

Everybody Needs a Good Day by Thatmalu

Series: [Happy \[2\]](#)

Category: IT (Movies - Muschietti), IT - Stephen King

Genre: Alternate Universe - Everyone Lives/Nobody Dies, Alternate Universe - Pennywise (IT) is Defeated in the First Battle, Angst, Angst with a Happy Ending, Bisexual Richie Tozier, Comfort Sex, Eddie Kaspbrak Loves Richie Tozier, F/M, First Kiss, Fluff and Angst, Fluff and Smut, Gay Eddie Kaspbrak, Happy Ending, Healing, Human Pennywise (IT), M/M, Past Rape/Non-con, Past Sexual Abuse, Past Violence, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder - PTSD, Sad Stanley Uris, Scared Stanley Uris, Snippets, Soft Eddie Kaspbrak, Soft Richie Tozier, every other chapter is eddie/richie centric, sexual healing

Language: English

Characters: Audra Phillips, Ben Hanscom, Beverly Marsh, Bill Denbrough, Eddie Kaspbrak, Mike Hanlon, Original Characters, Patricia Blum Uris, Richie Tozier, Stanley Uris

Relationships: Ben Hanscom/Beverly Marsh, Bill Denbrough/Audra Phillips, Bill Denbrough/Beverly Marsh, Eddie Kaspbrak/Richie Tozier, Mike Hanlon/Original Character(s), Patricia Blum Uris/St Stanley Uris, Stanley Uris/Original Character(s)

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2019-11-13

Updated: 2019-12-13

Packaged: 2019-12-16 15:06:09

Rating: Mature

Warnings: Rape/Non-Con, Underage

Chapters: 7

Words: 23,049

Publisher: [archiveofourown.org](#)

Summary:

Ten chapters focusing on trauma, aftermath, and healing following events caused by the very human and equally horrific Robert "Bob" "Pennywise" Gray. A Spin-Off of sorts to my short story, "Happy."

1. Stanley Uris Has a Good Day

Author's Note:

- For [ReddieSpaghetti](#).

For context, these 10 chapters are connected to all the events I wrote in my short fic, "Happy" which you can find here:

<https://archiveofourown.org/works/21010835/chapters/49969022>

Every other chapter will be Eddie/Richie centric, but I wanted to give the other losers some love after enjoying writing the first bit so much. The first chapter is inspired by ReddieSpaghetti, giving Stan some attention. Everyone gets a happy ending.

June 1994

Stanley Uris stared blankly at the gymnasium floor, fixated on the spinning lights dancing around like the students around him, colors changing rapidly, wondering if had he been epileptic, he would've dropped to the ground by now. He stood still, drink in his hand, just far enough from the refreshment table so that he wasn't in the way of anyone trying to sneak rum in the punch, but not quite close enough to the dancing that he would be caught up in it. He wasn't fully aware of what was going on in his surroundings, but he heard the soft humming of someone's voice breaching through the music, and looked up to large brown eyes behind coke-bottle lenses, lips moving with his words, a smirk growing on his face.

"What?" asked Stanley, not loud enough for Richie to quite hear him, but his lips moving enough for Richie to read them.

Richie placed his hand on Stan's shoulder, leaning into his ear, and said again, "I said, is there a t-rex coming or what?"

He pulled back and Stan stared at him blankly. Then, Richie pointed at Stan's drink, and Stan's eyes followed and saw his hand was shaking enough to cause ripples in the liquid. Stan gripped his wrist with his other hand to keep it steady. Richie's hand was still on his shoulder, and he gave Stan a gentle squeeze. "Don't worry, man. It's just a dance. I'm sure she's not expecting anything out of it; she just wants to dance and take pictures. You're the one who should be pressuring her into going to a shitty motel she doesn't want to go to."

Stanley shook his head, still locked on his punch. "That's it though. I just want this stupid dance to be over with, and I can't even escape by graduating for another year, and that's another year of people wondering why I didn't even try – "

"Stan, she's a senior. People will just assume she turned you down, that's all. Don't worry about it."

Don't worry about it. Of course Richie didn't worry. Richie had a faint understanding of what tormented Stan, he was sure Eddie did his best to articulate the horrors inflicted upon them, horrors one could never quite fathom unless you went through them in your very flesh. Richie had seen, even Stan had witnessed the abhorrent sight with Eddie before he truly experienced it for himself. He hadn't put much thought into his first kiss before that moment, when his back was against the dirty ground and wet blubbery lips locked over his own, teeth nipping at his tongue like a piranha, and his own scream caught in his throat, but grimy hands were gripping it so tightly he wasn't sure he'd even be able to breathe again –

Stanley shuddered noticeably, trying to shake the memory off before it reached the terrible climax, when his friends had found him far too late before other forms of Stan's innocence were taken from him. He was grateful to have Eddie and Beverly, though slightly sick of himself for finding even the slightest happiness from their own suffering. But, it put him at ease that he wasn't alone, and Eddie had shaken some awful thoughts that had been haunting him for so long.

January 1993

“Do you guys have sex?” Stanley had blurted out.

The shock of the sudden question had caused Eddie to inhale so quickly he nearly choked on his own spit caught in his throat. “What?” he croaked.

Stan sighed, annoyed he had to ask the question again that he had spent all night building the courage to. “Do you and Richie have sex?”

They sat on Stanley’s couch in his den, curled under separate blankets, a VHS rental of Batman Returns playing on Stanley’s TV. Eddie now took the remote and lowered the volume enough to have a proper conversation, but kept it loud enough so Stanley’s parents wouldn’t wonder why it was so quiet and bother them.

Stanley kept staring at Eddie, who stared back with his brow furrowed. “I mean, yeah,” he started. “But, not like I thought it would be.”

“What do you mean?” asked Stan. “How were you able to... do that after what happened?”

Eddie bit his lip, teeth pressing into his chapped skin. “Well... we don’t have sex the way I thought it would be,” he repeated. “We don’t... do... that.” He made a gesture, as though an image of two men having anal sex would appear before them, but Stanley knew what he meant and he was still confused. Eddie looked up and Stanley gave him a gesture to continue. Eddie sighed. “I don’t think I’d ever be able to do that. Not that I’m against anyone doing it. But, I don’t know if it’s because of what happened, or from years of my mother putting ideas in my head about ga – about people like me – being sick. Richie doesn’t care, and honestly it’s still amazing –“ he stopped himself, suppressing a grin and cheeks flushing at a memory from last night he was sure Stanley did *not* want the details of, and composed himself quickly.

“But, that doesn’t count, does it?” Stanley asked a little quieter, contemplating.

Eddie shrugged. “I think whatever you want to count is what matters.”

“But,” Stan said again. “How did you get over it so quickly? I keep thinking about getting with a girl, and her asking if I’ve ever had sex, and I’m technically not a virgin, and not in a way I wanted to lose it, but how do I explain that to someone without her being completely grossed out by *touching* me?” His voice was almost monotone until his voice broke slightly toward the end. He swallowed hard, a lump building in his throat.

“I’m not over it, Stan,” Eddie said firmly. “I think about it every day. Even sometimes... even when I’m in the moment and happy and enjoying myself, if Richie touches me,” he carefully scanned Stan’s face, hoping he wasn’t adding any unnecessary details. “Sometimes it comes back in flashes, and I have to push it away or I’ll just absolutely lose it and remind myself it’s Richie’s hands on me and not anyone else’s. It’s not my fault, it’s not Richie’s. It’s nothing Richie is doing wrong. And it wouldn’t help if I stopped letting him. Sometimes it feels like I’m stained, like my brain was dumped in bleach and everything good was sterilized. Maybe some parts are always going to be like that, but it doesn’t mean we’re ruined.” He saw Stan’s face had not changed expression, but his eyes had brightened with fresh tears forming. Eddie scooted closer so that their legs pressed together, but didn’t reach out, just in case. “You now, Richie trash talks a lot but he can be pretty wise sometimes. He told me virginity is a made up construct.”

Stan laughed, a tear escaping his eyes despite himself. “Is that his way of saying he never actually banged your mom?”

Eddie rolled his eyes and smiled. “Probably, in part. But he has a point. What happened to us had nothing to do with sex, especially since we weren’t active participants. I think it only counts when you want it to.”

Stanley thought about that for a moment, quietly wiping his cheek. Then, despite himself, “So, what do you guys do?”

Eddie flushed again and smirked. "You'd be surprised how creative you can be when you take out certain variables."

"That's probably as detailed as I want that answer to be."

"Oh, it definitely is. I could go into specifics if you want – "

"Stop, stop, stop," Stanley shook his head and shoved Eddie playfully. "I don't need to know; I shouldn't have asked."

"I'm just saying, these skills are a great investment, we don't even need condoms."

"Great investment," Stanley repeated. "I'm frugal cause it's wise, not because I'm Jewish, ya dick."

Playful anti-Semitism and images of his friends contorting naked in a bed aside, Stanley felt a great weight lift off of him. He liked the idea of his virginity not being tainted, not even really existing, and just the idea of *being* with someone and not making a big deal of what to call it. It seemed so carefree, and he was pretty happy that Eddie and Richie finally got together after years of relentless flirting. For now, was able to shake off some of that anxiety that had been plaguing him, but deep down Stan knew it would be quite a while for his fear to subside, as his memory still haunted him and it had been many years since he could honestly say he had a truly good day.

June 1994

"I'm going to propose to him, you know." Stan had been lost in thought momentarily, and was pretty sure he misheard what Richie had said over the bass of the woofer nearby. But, Richie continued on, "I asked Ben if I could do it at his party. I can't afford a ring or anything, but I just want him to know, you know? He keeps asking me constantly if I'm really going to come to New York with him, reminding me that the comedy scene in Chicago is so much better, like I'm just going to jump ship after all these years. Besides the fact neither of us is going to afford living on our own, he knows I love

him. I just gotta get it through to him and let him know it's real. Plus, the comedy scene in Chicago ain't shit without Trashmouth Tozier." Richie had been staring at Eddie and Bev, both laughing hysterically, involved in a dangerous imitation of the tango that was close to knocking out some nearby dancers. But then he turned to look back at Stan, expectantly.

"Can you two even get married? Legally?"

"Doubt it. Not yet. Maybe not ever. But I'd marry him right here and now if I could. And he's going to know that. I just have to take a leap of faith; no matter how scary it is; even if it's just getting on with a date."

Stan nodded, understanding. He tilted his cup back to his lips, gulping what was left of his punch, before tossing it into Richie's hands. "Leap of faith. Got it."

"Better catch her now before the next song."

Stan started to walk into the crowd towards his date, who was happily swinging around with her girlfriends, before quickly turning back to Richie. "Just so you know, when you can get married, it'll have to be a Jewish wedding. Because I'm gonna marry the shit out of you two if it's the last thing I do."

"Mazel tov," said Richie, grinning, as Stan finally made his way into the crowd.

Stan was just about to reach out to tap her shoulder when Sara Huester turned on the spot, as though sensing his return. Her blue eyes got wide, a huge smile on her face when she swung her arms around Stan's shoulders. "You're back!" she squealed, and Stan blushed. He had left her briefly to dance with her friends, worried she was not enjoying herself with his clumsy dance moves, but there she was, gripping him like he had brought back the very air she needed to breathe. She pulled back and looked at him, still beaming. "You wanna go for a walk?"

"Don't you want to dance?" Stan asked, his hand gingerly on her waist already. She shook her head, blonde curls dancing around her,

her smile still wide. She pulled away and grabbed his hand, pulling him out of the crowd.

There were two doors available to the students in case they wanted some air. First, there was the main entrance leading out to the parking lot, where faculty stood cross-armed and exhausted. The second led out to the track, where several students had filtered in and out to sneak out a joint or refill a flask with liquor stashed under the bleachers. Sara pulled Stan out into the warm June night, her arm locked with his once they were outside. There were some kids around outside, but she slowly started walking out away from the doors and toward the track. "It's really nice out tonight," she said, leaning her head against Stan's shoulder.

Stan gulped audibly, keeping his pace with hers, wondering why she wanted to get away from the dance with her friends and walk on the dirty track with a junior. "What made you want to come out here?"

She tilted her head up to look up to him, her face questioning. "Why'd you ask me to the prom, Stan?"

Stan opened his mouth, but no sound came out at first, feeling a bit like a trout. He knew that he asked her out so that he could be at prom with his friends. More specifically, he asked Sara out because they shared an AP Bio class together and she had always been incredibly kind. She was very pretty in a way that Stan didn't find intimidating, and finally got the courage to break up with her shitty boyfriend, Ian, who had screamed at her in the hallway the day after the supposed break up. Since she had no prom date, Richie and Bill pestered him relentlessly to take the opportunity and get into prom with them. Before Stan could find a way to articulate this kindly, she answered for him.

"You just wanted to be there for your friends, right? They're all seniors. It's OK," she said, when she saw Stan was about to defend himself. "I think that's really sweet. It's especially sweet because you've been, like, the best prom date I could've asked for."

"Were your expectations that low?" Stan asked incredulously as they rounded the first curve of the track, still walking slowly with their arms interlocked. "I stepped on your feet twice, I haven't been able to

hold a single conversation with your friends, and I'm pretty sure I elbowed your boob during 'Rump Shaker,' which, by the way, is a terrible song."

"Aaaaand you've been getting me drinks, and taking more time to get to know my friends than boyfriends ever have, and didn't mind me dancing with them, and you've been letting me talk about myself all night, and I'm pretty sure you've asked me about a hundred times if I'm having a good time. I'm also pretty sure I know more about wood ducks than I ever imagined I would."

"I sound really annoying."

She shook her head, smiling. "You're not annoying because you have interests, Stan, and you've been a great date. You're here for your friends and have still managed to make sure I have a good prom. That gets an A+ date rating from me." She slowed down to a stop, throwing her head back to look back at the school, making sure no one was nearby. They were now on the opposite side of the track, standing at the edge of light illuminating from a lamp post. She looked back at him, turning so that she was in front of him. "Is this your first date?"

Stan shuffled his feet, feeling his cheeks flush. "Is it that obvious?" He looked up and, God help him, she was still smiling so genuinely and looking quite more beautiful than Stan could ever remember she did during school hours. He couldn't help but feel the corners of his mouth pull him into a gentle smile, too.

"You're really sweet, Stan," she said. "I just wanted to thank you for being such a great guy."

Stan had barely opened his mouth to respond when she leaned forward and pressed her lips against his. Had he been expecting it, it might've gone differently. Then he felt cold, wet lips and suddenly his back was on dirty concrete, his heart constricting with terror, feeling like if he didn't do something immediately he was going to feel teeth nipping at him and a cold hand reaching down somewhere it shouldn't be; he instinctively threw an arm out, knocking into Sara's chest and throwing her off balance onto the ground with a yelp. Stan stood there in shock for a moment, staring down at Sara

(who was probably very thankful she went for an ankle-length dress), and her right heel had snapped from the sudden push. Her eyes were huge and frightened and Stan felt immediate guilt.

“Oh my god – I’m – I’m so sorry!” he reached down to help her up, but she flinched as he came towards her. He stood back, clasping his hands over his mouth. He was going to start hyperventilating. He couldn’t believe he had just physically assaulted his date because she was wearing *fucking lip-gloss*, wet lip-gloss that made him think of lips covered in drool that had pressed against his several years ago without his consent. Frankly, he wanted to die right then and there. He kept muttering, “I’m sorry, I’m sorry,” over and over, muffled behind his sweaty palms.

Sara had gotten up, looking more concerned than afraid now. “Stan?” she said, approaching him slowly, gently reaching a hand out. “Are you OK?”

“Are *you* OK?!” he practically shouted, throwing his hands away from his face, causing her to startle slightly. “I fucking pushed you, fuck, I’m so sorry, I’m sorry –“

“Shhh, it’s OK,” Sara said softly, approaching him again. She tentatively reached her hand out until it rested on his wrist, gently guiding his hands down. “That was my fault. Probably should’ve said something first.”

Stan knew she could feel how tense his muscles were under her soft palm and kind of wished she would let go, but feeling her warmth was slightly comforting. “I’m sorry,” he said again, not wanting to meet her eyes. “It’s just... your... your lip-gloss –“

She let out a laugh, catching him by surprise, his face lifting up to look at her. She stopped almost immediately, placing another hand over her mouth to quiet herself. Then, she lowered it down, undoing a wrap of her dress, pulling it up and wiping her mouth clean of any shine. She looked him in the eyes and gave him another genuine smile. “Better?”

Stan reached up to lightly pull her hand away from his wrist, but kept it gingerly in his own. “I pushed you.”

“There are worse ways to have a first kiss. Richie Tozier gave me a split lip once. He practically rammed his face into me.”

“Richie? My Richie Tozier? When?”

“Hmm,” she hummed thoughtfully, twisting her hand in his so that they were linking fingers. “I want to say it was sophomore year, during that crazy rager you and your friends snuck into at The Barn.”

The Barn was the old Bower’s home. It was abandoned, no one wanting to live there after Officer Bowers was found soaked in blood on his recliner (An act that ended up being placed on Robert Gray, releasing Henry from incarceration, despite what rumors said otherwise). It was now where the Derry teens sometimes threw parties. Mike would see crowds and kids running down and call up The Loser’s to coax them into sneaking in for some free booze. Stan remembered the exact party she was talking about, because Richie had boasted he could “get with anyone” he wanted, and Eddie took him up to the challenge and told him that Sara Huester was there and she was sober, so it wouldn’t be creepy if he tried to kiss her. To Eddie’s annoyance (now readable as slightly jealous), Richie had left his side, and the next thing they saw moments later was Sara running out from the next room, nursing a swollen lip, Richie apologizing frantically behind her. Stan shook his head beside Eddie and said, “He has no idea what he’s doing.”

“He had no idea what he was doing,” he said now, looking apologetically at Sara. “Sorry he head butt your face.”

Sara gave his hand a quick squeeze, making his stomach flip. “Do you want to try that again? I’ll let you go at your own pace; lip-gloss free.”

Stan took a deep breath in, letting it slip thinly out again. “Leap of faith,” he said.

“What –?”

He kissed her. Probably too firmly at first, not quite aware of how much pressure to give, but when he felt her against him and felt her press her chest into his, her arms reaching up around his neck and he

felt how it wasn't really that scary, he relaxed his mouth and leaned into her a little more, holding her waist. It was sweet and tender, the only worry on his mind was wondering how much exactly is someone supposed to open their mouth, but just like their dancing, he let her take the lead and followed clumsily along. Gentle and a little bit awkward; everything he had hoped a first kiss would have gone.

Sara brushed his cheek, pushing him gently away. They stared at one another for a moment, and then Sara flashed Stan another brilliant smile. "You want to come to my place tonight?"

The others never would have believed it if they didn't see Sara and Stan walking to her car in the parking lot together some dances later. Sara told her friends that she was going to drive Stan home and hit the hay early so her dad wouldn't worry, but she gave Stan a quick wink that wasn't lost on him. His mouth had gone dry and he was sure that he had a perpetual blush on his cheeks. He could hear Richie's words so clearly as though he was right there behind him in Sara's car, "You can't get embarrassed before you bone someone, all the blood is going to be in your cheeks instead of your dick." Stan wished he could 'beep, beep' his thoughts. He felt like he was in a dream, where everything was happening at once and suddenly he was sitting on Sara's floral bed sheets in her little twin bed. She was pulling her jewelry off while Stan literally twiddled his thumbs.

"My dad couldn't have been happier that I didn't have a boyfriend for prom," she was saying. "He gets an extra shift, and he doesn't have a worry at all that the nice Uris boy would dare come into my bedroom." She turned to him and smiled, kicking her heels off before making her way to sit next to him.

Stan had a difficult time trying to look at her, trying to articulate his thought process, opening his mouth to perhaps pay her a compliment and instead blurting out, "I don't want to have sex with you."

Sara blinked.

“Oh my god,” Stan muttered. “I didn’t mean, like – I just meant like I wasn’t trying to have sex with you. Those weren’t my intentions.”

“Your intentions?” she repeated, smirking.

Stan started patting his knees rhythmically, closing his eyes in embarrassment. “I didn’t plan on his happening, that’s all I was saying.”

“We don’t have to do anything. We could just watch a movie or something. I just thought... you’d be a really nice guy to get a do-over with.”

Stan opened his eyes and looked at her. “Do-over?”

She looked down at her hands and said, “I didn’t really want to have sex the first time I did. I didn’t say no or anything. I just figured he’d get upset if I didn’t. Not a lot of girls dream about losing their virginity being bent over the hood of a car.” She actually blushed, looking back up at him.

“Believe it or not, there are worse ways to have your first time,” he said quietly. Then, he placed his hand over hers and said, “Virginity is a made up construct.”

Sara let out a burst of laughter, her face lighting up again. “Is that so?”

“Yeah,” Stan said, pulling his leg up to face her properly. “It only counts if you want it to.”

Her eyes darted down to his lips and back up to meet his eyes. Her blue eyes seemed to sparkle when she whispered, “Let’s make this one count.”

Just like their kiss, it was clumsy and awkward, and probably perfect. Stan tripped getting out of his slacks and accidentally left his left sock on, and it took longer than he wished to slip the condom she gave him over his shaft, wondering how the hell you were supposed to make sure these things didn’t roll off. After it was secure, he shakily lowered himself over Sara under her covers; her eyes had gone slightly wide.

“You OK?” he whispered.

“Yeah, it’s just...” she bit her lip. “You’re... bigger than I expected.”

Despite his best efforts, Stan felt a slight swell in his self-esteem, briefly wondering if he should share this tidbit with the others. He thought better of it and reminded himself that he owned over a dozen bird books and to keep his ego in check.

Stan felt it difficult to multitask, catching himself being too still when he tried to kiss her, but hard to look at her face while trying to concentrate on moving his hips. There was so much going on between her beautiful face, their heavy breathing, her bare breasts just under his gaze, her soft hands gliding on his back and through his hair, how absolutely warm and wonderful it felt to be inside her, and an outsider might look at it like the dulllest soft-core porn on the market, but to Stanley Uris it was absolutely wild. After a small while she decided she would make things a little easier. They rolled around awkwardly, Stan resting his back against her headboard, squeezing her hips as she lowered onto him at a new angle that drove his mind absolutely mad, when he didn’t have to concentrate on anything else except for how she felt and he clutched unto her tightly for the few brief thrusts of her hips it took before he buried his face into her neck underneath her and shuddered in his brief ecstasy.

There was a wonderful moment of contentedness before she moved herself off of him and Stan realized how absolutely disgusting and messy sex was once it was over. Sara patiently waited while Stan used some tissues to get everything wet and sticky off of him, discarding the waste in her trash bin discretely underneath some papers. He scooted back under the covers and lay there in both awe and disgust, but was still not quite over the high of his orgasm.

“You good, Uris?” Sara asked teasingly, stretching her arm across his chest.

He reached up and stroked her arm, turning to look at her. “It sucks you’re not staying in Derry. No,” he shook his head, chuckling. “It sucks I’m not *leaving* Derry. I wouldn’t wish staying here on anyone.”

Her face was soft as she traced along his collarbone with her fingers.

“Is it OK that we did this? I don’t want you to feel like I made this all about me and left you behind.”

Stan smiled at her, a genuine happiness elating him. “You didn’t. This was perfect. Thank you for this; for the whole night. My own prom is never going to live up to it.”

Sara would be leaving for college in less than a month, going down to live with her mom in Boston. They both knew this wasn’t something to last, but it was something they both wanted, and it was a memory Stan was grateful to have and cherish. They were both silently thankful that they wouldn’t be plagued with self-conscious fear when they met someone new again, a happy memory to shake away discomfort. Sara leaned over and gently pressed her lips against Stan’s, and he smiled into their kiss, ending the first truly good day he had had in a very long time.

2. Everything

Summary for the Chapter:

Eddie slowly comes to terms with his sexuality with a little help from Richie, his aunt, and the Wizard of Oz.

Notes for the Chapter:

I don't really know what to say, but I really had a lot of fun with the movie bits. I could've made it longer, but it felt repetitive. Enjoy!

September 1992

Morning sunlight started creeping into Richie's bedroom while he slept quietly, a leg sticking out from the covers, his limbs starfished on his stomach, one of his arms draped over Eddie's chest. Eddie was still, staring at the ceiling feeling... well, weird. His childhood friendship with Bill was normal and easy until Richie made his way into their lives, giving Eddie undetectable feelings in his gut and driving him fucking crazy. Puberty made it far worse, creating a pattern of shame and discomfort when Eddie would quietly touch himself in the shower and Richie's dumb face would pop into his mind. He absolutely hated himself for it, sometimes taking it out on Richie the next day by getting infuriated over the most mundane things, only to end up curled up with him in the clubhouse hammock with secret pleasure burning in his body. It sure didn't help that just about any time he jerked off after what happened to him in Neibolt he would end up crying shamefully, and he couldn't just stop because he was a teenager full of hormones and he just couldn't help himself, and it was the only time he thought he'd ever be able to feel any joy from another guy, even if it was in his head.

Now Eddie was in Richie's bed, like a million times before except Eddie was much too aware of the fact that Richie had *touched* him last night and he had seen Eddie at his most vulnerable moment,

physically and emotionally and it was both uncomfortable and erotic to stare Richie in the eyes with Richie's hand on him. Richie didn't cringe away or get grossed out when Eddie had spilled into his hand, but smiled back like he was so damn pleased with himself. Eddie was ruminating over every detail and wondering if the high over their experience would wear off of Richie when he woke up, if the moments they shared together were a fluke and Richie would make a dumb joke about it and Eddie would go back to his suppressed little ball of anger and crying in the shower when he masturbated. The thought caused a sharp pang in his heart and he turned his head to look over at Richie; this didn't help. Eddie breathed a heavy sigh, reaching over to touch Richie's face which was just so fucking *cute* and Eddie hated that he thought that. The second his finger tips reached Richie's cheeks, Richie's mouth spread into a wide smile, pulling his arm off Eddie's chest and up to cup the back of Eddie's hand with his own, bringing it up to his lips to press a quick kiss. Eddie's heart practically plunged down into his stomach.

"Morning, sunshine," Richie whispered into Eddie's palm, his eyes still closed, rolling over and stretching his limbs out like a cat. Eddie stared at him, not knowing how he should begin this conversation. Richie opened his eyes, looked over and smiled.

"Wassup?" Eddie said awkwardly.

Richie raised an eyebrow. "Romantic." He grinned wider and pushed himself up, suddenly hovering over Eddie, who was wearing nothing but Richie's too-big pajama pants that were slipping dangerously too far down Eddie's hips, and he wasn't sure if he wanted Richie's eyes wandering down that way just now. He kept his eyes on Richie's, hoping Richie couldn't see the uncertainty on his face without his glasses on, but they were close enough that Eddie could feel his breath.

"So," Richie drawled. "What are we doing?"

Eddie gulped. His hands went down to his sides. "We could just have cereal or something."

Richie shook his head. "I meant what are we doing, Eds? I know I said we could practice, but... I gotta be honest with you buddy, I'm

smitten. You got me hooked like heroin already.”

Several emotions flickered over Eddie’s face, from joy, fear, embarrassment, and concern. He was still unsure. He wanted this to be sincere more than anything, but he couldn’t suppress the suspicion that Richie was pulling his leg.

“Is this a joke?” Eddie asked quietly.

Richie’s expression dropped, humor erased and frustration taking its place. “Do you think I’d be that much of a dick to lead you on after you had to courage to come out to me like that? After all we’ve been through? After all you’ve been through? Do you really think I’d just make out with you and jerk us both off for shits and giggles?”

Eddie’s lips pursed in embarrassment. But then he said quietly, “You don’t know what it’s been like... I’d hate myself when I would get a hard-on, worrying that my best friend would hate me if he... if you knew... if you knew how I had felt...” He looked away. “I was coming to terms with being alone for eternity. Living in Derry, being r-raped, and feeling like I was just sick. Even Aunt Judy, as big a hippie as she is, I don’t know if I could even tell her. I just thought I’d die alone or maybe when you guys left Derry and forgot about me and I had no one else I could just make it easier and just run into traffic.”

Richie’s hand took Eddie’s chin firmly and forced him to look back at him. “Don’t you dare fucking say that again Eddie Kaspbrak. I am not going to let that happen.” He softened his expression and released Eddie’s chin, choosing now to trace his jaw line lightly. “We will never forget about you. I will *always* be by your side, Eds. Even before I realized I wanted our relationship to be like this, you were always my everything. Is that OK? That I want to be with you like this?”

Eddie studied Richie’s uncommonly serious facial expression. “It’s more than OK, ‘Chee. I want... I want all that gross boyfriend stuff. I want the dates; I want the hand holding, and fucking cuddling on movie nights. But I want my best friend; I want everything we already have. I want you to be my everything, too.”

Richie smiled, stroking Eddie's cheek with the back of his fingers. "Can I kiss you, Eds?" He was still so cautious to make sure consent was granted.

Eddie wordlessly pulled Richie down into him. His heart burst into confetti and it sprinkled over all his negative thoughts, burying them under pure color and joy. He dipped his tongue into Richie's open mouth, only slightly offended by the morning breath. He was getting confident and hungry; mainly, because he was getting horny. He pulled back again, his lips glistening with spit where Richie had traced his tongue. "Screw cereal."

"Huh?" Richie said, caught off guard.

Eddie wrapped his legs around Richie to grip him and pushed them up, pressing his hand into Richie's chest and back down onto the other end of the bed, where Richie's head hung slightly off the edge. He made a move to scoot down, but Eddie firmly kept him in place.

"I want to go down on you."

Eddie couldn't even believe the words that were coming out of his mouth so clearly. Richie's eyes grew wide, though slightly unfocused when he had no lenses to see through.

"Eds... you don't have to do that. Maybe we went a little crazy last night. I don't want you to feel like we have to go this fast."

"Rich," Eddie said, pressing his hips into Richie's, feeling how hard they both were. "I have waited ten fucking years for this. I didn't even think I'd ever get a chance to be with you. I want to suck you off if you want me to. I want to return the favor."

Richie nodded, a rare time he was lost for words. Eddie started pulling his shirt off, catching slightly on the covers beneath him before it was yanked over his head and discarded across the room. He couldn't make out Eddie's face, but his skin burned under Eddie's gaze. He felt his hands both slide over Richie's chest up to his shoulders and slowly back down, taking the sight of him in. Eddie's fingertips caressed Richie under his ribcage and down the curve of his hip bones. An odd heat flash ran through Richie's body, nervous

electricity striking every cell in his body and causing his dick to swell harder under Eddie's weight.

"Watcha doin', Eds?" he breathed.

Eddie looked back into Richie's eyes, though he couldn't see it, but he felt his gaze like it was looking at his soul and he wished he could see the dark brown more clearly.

"I never thought I'd say this," Eddie whispered. "But, you're, like, really beautiful. I wish I could've been touching you like this all the time."

"Wow," Richie said softly. "That's... that's really gay."

There was a second of silence and then they both burst out laughing, Eddie leaning down and chuckling into Richie's neck. Richie wrapped his arms around Eddie, loving the feeling of Eddie pressed into him, hating himself or not realizing he wanted this sooner. The vibrations from Eddie's laughter were creeping into Richie's heart, making it swell; he was so in love with him.

He could feel Eddie smile into his neck, planting small pecks into his pulse points. Richie was still laughing quietly until he felt Eddie's lips part and he began to nibble into his neck, slowly and deliberately, sucking the tender skin.

"Mm. Now *that* is really gay."

Eddie responded by reaching his hand down between their groins and cupping Richie in his hand, sending Richie's hips up in an unexpected jerk. "Beep beep, Richie." It was in Richie's ear as soft and smooth as margarine, and Richie bit his tongue to keep quiet if it meant Eddie would keep touching him like that. Eddie nibbled at Richie's earlobe, rubbing Richie's shaft through the fabric of his pants, the back of his hand grazing his own, the weight of Eddie's body pressing down to grind them together. "Is this OK, Rich?"

"Please do whatever the fuck you want to me," Richie blurted out before he could help himself.

He almost protested when Eddie removed his hand, but then he felt

his mouth working down his chest, and as he remembered what Eddie's original proposal entailed he gripped the covers tightly in preparation of what he had imagined it would feel like having Eddie's warm, wet mouth pressed around him.

Eddie's weight shifted up and he was near Richie's face again, his hand gently on Richie's throat, guiding Richie's head back to lean backwards over the edge.

"What are you - ?"

"Just don't watch this time. Please." His voice was nervous, but still firm, because he would be damned if he didn't go through with this.

"Anything for you," Richie said, closing his eyes and relaxing his head back.

The blood rushing down his head was *something* of an experience and somehow Eddie had managed to suppress whatever gag reflex he had and boy, oh boy, was this kid being enthusiastic. Richie knew he didn't sport the Washington Monument in his jeans, but he was still impressed with how much Eddie was able to get in. Eddie's nervousness and determination to do a good job, his complete and utter trust in Richie, and Richie thankfully still tasting a bit like cucumber body wash and lavender breeze fabric softener from his boxer shorts made this positively easy. To Eddie's surprise (and Richie's absolute pleasure), this was *fun* and Eddie let his hand rake all over Richie while his other worked with his mouth up and down him, a wave of pleasure rippling through him with each of Richie's moans and soft "fuck"s. Eddie was pressing his own hips into the mattress, needing to release a bit of himself from his excitement. He was about to pull back and start teasing Richie a bit, but then he felt his hand gripping him by his hair, holding him still and inspiring Eddie to work harder, not even worried about how much spit was dribbling from his mouth. He sucked in harder, making Richie inhale sharply, his hip bucking u, thrusting his dick slightly into the back of Eddie's throat.

"Fuck, Eds – I'm right there," Richie gasped, releasing his hand from Eddie's hair so Eddie could pull away, but Eddie made a quick calculation and instead kept his lips locked, cheeks sucking in hard

and creating friction against Richie's tip until –

"Ah, fuck!" Richie's body shuddered as he felt himself spill into Eddie's mouth, which thankfully slowed to a stop around his sensitive tip, every twitch and movement now too much on Richie's sore flesh now.

Richie breathed heavy, gasping as Eddie pulled off and exposed his hot skin to the air. Eddie had moved back somewhere, and Richie lifted his head to see where he was going, but was taken aback by the rush of blood pounding in his head from the sudden lift after having his hand hanging upset down of the bed. He felt dazed and sleepy, and then Eddie was there to shove Richie's glasses on his face. He could see Eddie clearly for the first time that morning, and he was awestruck. Eddie's hair was disarray from sleep and Richie's hands, his lips pink, glistening and swollen, cheeks flushed over his freckles, but looking quite proud of himself. Richie couldn't help himself when he said, "God, you're beautiful."

"Wow. That's pretty gay," said Eddie, smirking.

"Just for you," Richie grinned, pulling Eddie back on top of him and kissing him firmly. He was quite sure he could taste himself, slightly salty and sweet on Eddie's lips, but he didn't mind. Eddie pulled back and stared at him.

"Why is that, I wonder?"

Richie shrugged. "Don't know. Don't care. I'm Eddie-sexual now. I'm all yours."

Eddie smiled softly and pressed his forehead into Richie's, the rims of Richie's glasses cold on the skin of his brow. "I love you, 'Chee."

"I love you, too, Eds," Richie said. They couldn't even question how easy it was to say, because they knew they had loved each other or a very long time, even without the prospect of dick sucking.

Richie had to ask. "Did you actually swallow it."

"Yeah. It was easier that way. I didn't want to clean up a mess, and I definitely wasn't holding your cum in my mouth all the way to the

bathroom to spit it out, that's way gross. This way I just had to deal with it for a second. Plus, it didn't taste that bad."

"Really?"

"Must be all the sugar. All that trash you eat must make it sweet."

Richie grinned. "Awesome." He furrowed his brow. "You don't feel hard anymore."

Eddie blushed. "I, uh... I'm gonna need to change again." Richie stared at him. "I couldn't really help it, I was getting off listening to you and I... basically humped your bed."

"Fuck dude, that's gross," Richie said unenthusiastically, shaking his head. "I *just* washed these sheets, like, last month."

"That's fucking disgusting, Richie."

"You love it," Richie said. "So, blowjobs aside... You want to start doing gross boyfriend stuff with me?"

Eddie beamed. "Richie Tozier, I would love to be your boyfriend."

November 1992

The silence was steady and thick, but Eddie felt cozy in it, like it was wrapping him a warm hug. He was careful not to scrap his fork against the fine china and disturb the atmosphere, even though he was *really* digging this pumpkin pie. Normally, he and his Aunt Judy would take a long drive to his grandmother's for Thanksgiving, but Judy and Eddie both agreed neither one of them wanted to deal with the Kaspbrak madness, settling instead for a quiet evening alone so they could relax and watch *The Wizard of Oz* without Eddie's cousins pinching his cheeks and calling him cute (a privilege Eddie strictly reserved for Richie). Eddie could remember watching it with his father very young on Thanksgiving evenings. He had no idea what it had to do with the holiday, but it was always on, and his mother

refused to leave it on after his father passed away. Once Judy came to take care of Eddie, and the tradition came back, he started to notice particularities in the film that intrigued him enough to ask around and confirm his suspicions; this movie resonated with him so much because he was, well, a “friend of Dorothy.” Hopefully, he too would leave his dull black and white limited Derry life for one filled with color and welcoming.

“Eddie, sweetie, you want to grab some blankets for the couch,” Judy asked, taking their empty plates. “I’ll clean up and set the TV on, ok?”

“Yes, ma’am,” Eddie replied kindly, giving her a quick kiss on the cheek when he handed her his dish. He loved that Judy never demanded affection or made Eddie feel guilty for anything she did for him. He also was quite happy that he had to lean *down* slightly to reach her, even if he was still the shortest of his friends.

He made his way up to his bedroom to grab some fleece throws, opening the door and nearly having a heart attack to find a long-legged and grinning boy on his bed.

“Richie, what the *fuck*?” Eddie gasped, clutching his chest. “It’s a goddamn holiday.”

“You shouldn’t leave your window open, Eds,” Richie said, swinging his legs to dangle over the bed’s edge. “You’ll catch a cold in your sleep. Plus, you never know when some creep is going to climb in unexpectedly. Whoa now –!”

Eddie had dropped to his knees, but shoved Richie’s legs to crawl under him and reach under the bed. “Don’t be stupid, my Aunt is waiting. And you should be home.” He grabbed two blankets and pulled them out, pushing himself back up and feeling Richie’s fingers grab the waistband of his pants.

“The Tozier household is obliterated right now. My youngest cousin is 21 now and it’s a shitfest of drunk, sloppy grownups being weird.” He tried to pull Eddie close, but Eddie tucked the blankets under his arm and used his hands to keep Richie from getting too frisky. He sighed. “I brought wine.”

Eddie's eyes flashed to a bottle next to Richie on his bed and he shook his head. "I can maybe see us having a glass if you offer it to Aunt Judy."

Richie grabbed the bottle and held it protectively. "Why would I give it to Jude's for?"

"Cause if you're going to stay here, you're going to come watch the Wizard of Oz with us downstairs. Now, c'mon."

Richie groaned dramatically as Eddie started leaving. "Isn't that movie *ancient*? I can't even remember it, except that version the high school did when we were in 5th grade and let us be background munchkins."

"Let's go, Trashmouth. It's weird and creepy and you'll love it." He waited a moment until Richie finally got up and came along with him.

"Aunt Judy!" Eddie called as they came down. "We have an intruder!"

They heard her good-natured sigh before entering the room. "Hi, Richard!"

Eddie did not protest Richie wanting to share his blanket (fairly, he only had the two), but did not miss his aunts side-eye glances at them practically cuddling. Judy indeed allowed them to have a couple fingers of wine each, and Eddie felt the liquid courage, bravely taking Richie's hand in his under the blanket shortly after Dorothy's house dropped on the witch. Eddie also elbowed Richie gently in the ribs when the Scarecrow said to Dorothy, "Of course, some people do go *both* ways." And Richie grinned, catching on quickly to the little quirks Eddie enjoyed from the movie. "I think the road I picked was a pretty good choice," Richie whispered, squeezing Eddie's hand, which spread warmth through Eddie like he dipped into a hot bath.

Judy ran out quickly to run to the restroom, and Richie leaned his head down onto Eddie's shoulders. "I can't believe I went all these years without this wacky masterpiece. I'm putting it up there with Rocky Horror."

“Richie... do you think I’m brave?”

“Like a lion,” Richie replied.

Eddie sighed. “I’m serious. Do you think I’ll ever be brave enough to get out of Derry and be myself in the real world?”

Richie looked back up at Eddie, quickly placing a small kiss at the curve of his jaw. “Eddie, you’re one of the bravest dudes I know. You stood face to face with a court of people and told them everything you went through, which you *still* go through every day, and it was enough for them to justify us literally *killing* someone and you still make a big deal over algebra tests like that crazy shit wasn’t even a thing.”

“Don’t say it like that,” Eddie said, uncomfortable. He didn’t like to think that they killed Robert as much as they did just defend themselves to save their friends, but there was always justifiable retribution for it.

“Sorry,” Richie said. “But I’m serious. You’re braver than you think. Being in Derry is practically a death sentence, it would be stupid to go around waving pride flags around, but we’ll be ready one day.”

They looked at each other for a moment, smiling wordlessly, until the moment was interrupted by the sound of the bathroom door opening and Judy coming back. Richie didn’t look away, because something changed in Eddie’s facial expression, making him look slightly crazy or sick. Then, just as Judy began approaching –

“AUNT JUDY I’M GAY!”

Richie’s eyes went wide as saucers, as did Eddie’s, who seemed completely shocked at his own actions. “I’m sorry I shouted,” he said apologetically, still not looking at her. He kept looking at Richie, whose eyes followed Judy until she stood next to them and gently placed a gentle hand on Eddie’s shoulder, finally forcing him to look back at her. Her expression was soft and he felt himself relax a little.

“Eddie,” she said. “I love you more than anything. I know nothing can erase the terrible things you’ve been through, but I’m so happy

that you can start to become at peace with just a bit of who you are.” She gently touched Eddie’s cheeks; his eyes started to water. “No matter how cruel the world is out there to you, I’m always going to be your safe space, OK? I just want you to be happy.”

“You mean that?” Eddie croaked, happy tears falling down his cheek onto her hand.

“Of course I do. Besides,” she sighed, eyes darting to Richie. “Our walls aren’t *that* thin. You could’ve been more discrete.”

Richie practically guffawed, and Eddie felt his cheeks flush, pushing her hand away in embarrassment. “Oh my god, Judy...”

Despite his embarrassed groan, she leaned down and gave him a kiss on the forehead. “I think you deserve another glass of wine. Holiday and coming out day exclusive, so no ideas!”

She left again to fetch another glass, having herself finished the one Richie had brought. Eddie was shaking his head in pleased disbelief, and Richie pulled him close into his chest, nuzzling his face into Eddie’s hair.

“I’m proud of you, Eddie.”

Eddie smiled, relaxing completely into Richie. Later, when Richie would fall asleep, they’d talk over tea about all his feelings and fears and she’d be there listening and being supportive and being there for him the best way possible. She had always reminded Eddie that he was not a victim of assault, but a *survivor*, and he wasn’t a kid who killed a man, he was a *fighter* who protected his friends. And now she was here making sure he wasn’t ashamed of who he was in love with, because he wasn’t a freak and he wasn’t sick; love was just *love*. It was a fitting end to a really great evening, the three of them spending the evening cozy and chatting on the couch, and Judy revealing even more truth to the connections of Wizard of Oz to the gay community, the pride flags, and rumors about the Stonewall Riots and how inspirational Judy Garland was, and Eddie felt a lot more respect and pride that she was his aunt; and he had already loved her to death. Terrified of the real world as he was, he was happy and warm and always welcome in this home; here, in Richie’s arms and with Judy’s

love, he had everything he could ever need.

Notes for the Chapter:

If Bev is Dorothy, Richie is definitely the "awful lot of talking" scarecrow," Eddie is the Tin-Man (inhaler instead of oil can), Ben is the Lion who doesn't realize he's brave when he is, Bill is Toto (Just for being a little shit to the wicked witch), Mike is the wizard (with his library of knowledge) and Stan is Glenda because of their shared sass (I mean, she says all bad witches are ugly SECONDS after asking Dorothy if she's a good or bad witch, that's savage). I'm not sorry I thought about this.

Also, yes, Eddie's aunt is named after Judy Garland.
:)

3. Not Like That

Summary for the Chapter:

Bill takes a trip to Portland.

Notes for the Chapter:

I don't know why this chapter was so difficult, so I hope it didn't come out too bad, but it is shorter than I thought.

Alas, I can't seem to leave Reddie out, even in the other Loser's chapters.

January 1992

Ever since running into Beverly at Mr. Keene's pharmacy and watching her walk to him almost in slow motion, pack of cigarettes in hand, red hair tied to the side and bouncing along her shoulder, Bill had dreamed of this very moment. While he was technically on top of her, she had complete control, like she was calculating every move for him and orchestrating their love making effortlessly. It was a little clunky and awkward for him, as it usually was with teenagers, but her confidence and demeanor radiated such mature energy, Bill could not see her as a girl anymore, but a sexy, sensual woman.

He thought, for a moment after, that he would hold her in his arms like he had so many times before in his dreams, but she sat up to light a cigarette. Bill scrunched his nose, a little turned off by the smell, but he supposed this meant she was satisfied. Bev flipped her lighter shut and leaned back down into her bed, taking a long drag before turning to Bill with a wide smile.

"Thanks for this," she said.

Bill was a little taken aback. "Oh. Uh, y-you're welcome." He wasn't exactly sure this was protocol for sex. He thought about putting his arm around her, trying his best to ignore the cigarette smell, but

suddenly, she had placed the cigarette in her mouth and gotten out of bed, turning to him just before taking the covers off.

“Don’t look,” she said between her teeth, holding her cigarette steady.

“Uh, OK.” This was definitely weird. Just a couple minutes ago he had seen everything... not to mention he was face first between her legs before that. He covered his eyes and kept them shut, waiting as he felt her weight lift off the mattress, parting to put her clothes back on. “M-m-mind telling me why I c-can’t look now?”

“I don’t want to get used to your eyes on me. I don’t want to give off the wrong idea.”

“Wait, what?” Bill said, sitting up and looking at her.

“Bill!” she said, jeans on but unbuttoned, her bra on but shirtless. “I said don’t look!”

“W-why?” he asked again, not moving.

“I just told you!” she said a little louder, looking frustrated. “I don’t want you to see me!”

“W-what’s the d-d-difference between now and b-before?”

“My consent,” she said sternly. “Close. Your. Eyes.”

Bill felt a pang in his chest, like someone dripped hot wax into his lungs. He wasn’t mad because he necessarily wanted to see her naked so eagerly, but her sudden protest to it despite being so enthusiastic to let him touch her before. Still, he closed his eyes, keeping a grumpy frown on his face. He was about to say something when he felt something fall into his lap and he opened his eyes again. It was his pants and boxers. He looked up at her, fully dressed now and putting out her cigarette.

“D-did I do something wrong?” Bill asked, frustrated.

Beverly sighed, exasperated. “No, Bill. Everything was great. I want to keep it that way. I don’ want to ruin this by turning it into

something it's not."

Bill couldn't comprehend what she was saying. She didn't know why he couldn't understand; every flirtatious remark and gesture suggested she wanted to have sex, and not necessarily with him, but wanted to be touched and fucked the way she wanted. But she didn't know Bill pushed those thoughts aside, because he had thought, *Beverly's not like that.*

"I thought," he started, speaking slowly. "We both wanted this for..." He paused, trying not to stutter and speak clearly. "Wanted this for a v-very long time. To be together."

She looked him directly in the eyes, never breaking her gaze. "Bill... I told you I never wanted to come back to Derry. That's why I wanted to see you here, in Portland. I can't tie myself down to anything there. I don't know where I'm going after high school, but I don't want anything holding me in place, making a decision for me."

She said this all fast, like she had been holding it in like her breath, like she'd burst if she didn't release it. And Bill... that pain in his chest spread like a gas lit flame, engulfing whatever lightness he felt before, making it hot and heavy.

"Why?" he said thickly. "Wh-why did you w-want to d-do this?"

She finally broke their gaze, looking past him, like she was seeing something not really there. "All I had were painful memories. I could never dream of what it would be like to have sex, to love someone like that. Whenever I thought about it... all I felt was him."

"You mean... Robert Gray?"

She blinked, eyes wet but not crying, shaking her head softly. "Dad."

Bill stared, his mouth parting slowly in surprise, then closing with a tightened jaw. It took him an instant just then to realize how stupid he had been to not know that before, to not realize why Beverly hated him so much, why she fought him back so hard he ended up in the hospital.

"I just wanted to know what it was like," Beverly continued, her

voice still soft. "To feel it like it was meant to be. I wanted to gut all those memories out and replace them with something else. Robert didn't take anything any that wasn't already gone. But I wanted it back. I wanted to feel in control, to get back what was lost and make it mine again." She finally looked back at Bill. When their eyes met, she expected to find understanding, but her gut felt acidic; his expression had not softened.

"You'd think," he said. "Th-that having that h-happen to you w-would make you smarter."

She frowned. "What is that supposed to mean?"

"C-cause you're not like that, Bev!" An ice pick through her heart. "Y-you're not like other girls."

"Oh. Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't realize. I'm not *supposed* to be slutty, because I was *raped* right? I'm supposed to be chaste and fucking *pure* because of what my daddy did to me? I'm not supposed to act like *damaged goods*?"

"That's not –" He tensed his fists, pressing them into the bed in front of them, trying not to scream. "That's NOT what I meant, Bev."

"Then what, Bill? How should I be different than other girls? Like get antennas, walk like a spider, turn into a fucking transformer? What is wrong with how other girls are? Is it OK that guys can fuck around, but when a girl does it, it's inappropriate? That's bullshit. I should be able to do what I want, because I didn't get a choice before, did I?"

"Then SAY that!" Bill said angrily, his eyes stinging. "Don't be a d-dick to me and m-make me think th-this is leading somewhere just because s-something shitty happened to *you*, Bev! Cause this hurts," he pointed to his heart, which felt like it was tearing in two. "Thinking y-you wanted m-m-more than this, and just – just using me. Cause th-that's what you did. Y-you used me to m-m-make yourself feel better."

His tears were cold on his cheeks, which were flushed red with embarrassment. They were both crying now, angry and scared and hurt. They both stared at each other for a few moments, stunned at

how damaging a simple act had been. They both hated that they loved each other in this moment; Bill, because he wanted to be with her and she wouldn't; Beverly, because she didn't want to spoil her freedom to get as far away from Maine as possible, wherever she went.

"I'm sorry," Bev said, breaking the silence. "I know it was selfish. I didn't think..." she trailed off, not knowing how to address his feelings for her.

"Neither did I," Bill muttered. She couldn't hear him, but she was too afraid to ask him to repeat himself. He wiped his face with the back of his hand. He was suddenly very aware of how naked he was. "I should g-g-get dressed."

Beverly nodded, turning away to give him his privacy. She rested her head against her wall, feeling hollow. She had been sick of not seeing her friends, usually only hearing from Richie every other weekend or so and Mike more rarely than that. Ben had once been calling her every other day, but after high school started and their calls got shorter, the length of time between them became less and less until calls from him became extinct entirely. The others had only spoken to her through them, and she didn't mind, because she wasn't calling them either and it was a lot to keep up with for over 2 years. She had last seen them all at Eddie's mom's funeral, and couldn't believe the excitement she felt when she called Bill for his birthday and jokingly told Bill she'd buy him a ticket to Portland and he said yes. But now, she felt worse than all those months and years apart from them. She felt like she set the bridge to their friendship on fire. She wondered if Bill would tell Richie and Mike, and they'd stop calling her, too, or spit insults to her over the phone. She didn't know which would be worse.

Bill sat on the edge of Beverly's bed, folding his hands in his lap. He was still angry, that was for sure. But, he thought about Stan and Eddie. Stan hadn't hugged Bill in over 2 years. Eddie, on the other hand, clung to affection like he had to his placebos, always holding on a little longer to hugs than one normally would, and had stopped fighting with Richie over the hammock, instead choosing to crawl into it with him without argument. When Richie made a sex joke that went a little far, Stan's usual sass was gone, replaced by withdrawn

dissociation, and Eddie's playfully annoyed banter rose to angry outbursts that could keep Richie near-silent for several days before being forgiven, which Bill could only explain in his mind by one of them crawling through the other's window the night before with whispered apologies. He could only imagine how destroyed they were on the inside, only knowing how it felt to lose his brother after he suffered the same fate. They all handled it so differently, and he knew, even if she had been wrong to hurt Bill, she should be forgiven.

"Beverly," he finally said, startling her just a little. "I'm... s-sorry I said those things. I didn't m-mean them the way they s-sounded. I think... I was j-just trying to..."

"Make me feel how you felt?" she finished for him, slowly making her way back to the bed and sitting beside him. "I'm sorry, Bill. You're right. I should've told you exactly what I wanted. I didn't want it to be like this."

"It's OK," he said, giving her a soft smile, even though it still killed him inside. "I g-get it. I mean... I d-don't get it. Which is wh-why I get it."

She reached out, hesitating slightly before resting her hand on his shoulder. They sat quietly again, and almost as though she knew what he had been thinking about, "How are Stan and Eddie?"

Bill frowned. "As g-good as they can g-get, I guess. Stan's been... comp-p-posed. Eddie..."

"Eddie was a mess last year," she said, remembering how they had to coax Eddie to leave his house for his mom's funeral, after he compulsively rubbed himself raw in the shower for days straight, like he was trying to scrap off his own feelings through his skin.

Bill nodded. "H-he's been doing b-b-better. His aunt got him a th-therapist."

"Oh, thank god," Beverly sighed, still angry at (god rest her soul) Mrs. Kaspbrak for refusing to let Eddie go to a *shrink*. Of all things she didn't want Eddie to heal from... Deep down, they knew she

desperately wanted to be the sole protector of Eddie.

Bill nodded in agreement. "His aunt's p-pretty cool. She's b-b-been good for Eddie, I think. You can t-tell he's still..." *Fucked up*, is what he wanted to say, but he felt it best left unsaid.

"It must be different. I'm not saying it's any better or worse for us than for Stan, but... there's definitely something terrifying, knowing what happened to you is something you have to face again in such a different context. One way so violent... the other..." she gestured to Bill, a small reminder of the moment they had earlier, which was quite lovely out of context from the rest of the night.

"Yeah. Wait," Bill said, puzzled. "What do you mean u-us than f-f-for Stan?"

"No, no," Beverly said, waving her hand. "Not us, like, you and me. For..." She stopped, contemplating. "Has Eddie ever told you about any girls he liked?"

Bill was perplexed, frowning as he wondered why she came to ask that question. "Uhh... he ended up in s-seven minutes in heaven with a f-freshman named Beth during a Christmas party at The B-barn. They got to s-second base, but they didn't d-date or anything. Why?"

Beverly let out a quiet laugh, shaking her head with a soft, sad smile on her face. "That poor kid. I can't imagine how he's dealing with everything."

Bill waited, but Beverly didn't explain further. He figured he didn't need to know. "Well, at least he's got R-Richie. Richie al-always comes through for him."

Beverly's heart swelled a little with warmth at the thought. She turned to look at Bill, his eyes a little blood shot, but face clear and composed. "You and me? We're good?"

Bill's eyes darted back and forth between her blue eyes, taking her expression in. "Yeah. Of course. And d-don't worry. Y-you can make me sound like a st-stud and leave out the fighting and crying stuff."

He smiled. She smiled back. "Sure thing, Big Bill."

It was later that night. Bill had left on the Greyhound in the morning after their talk with his Unaccompanied Child bus ticket, heading back to Derry. Beverly had finished with the dishes after dinner before taking the cordless phone up to her room.

“Bevvy!” Richie’s voice came booming through the receiver with some unknown accent. “What do I owe this pleasure?”

“First of all, don’t ever call me that again. Did Bill get home OK?”

“Why? Miss him already?” He started making kissing noises through the phone.

“Ugh, what did he tell you?”

“Oh my fucking god, there’s actually something to tell?! Spill the beans, Marsh! You pop Bill’s cherry or what?”

Richie made a funny noise, like he had knocked into the edge of some furniture. Beverly went into some not too explicit detail of the events, glossing over the argument she and Bill had had. It was silent for a moment on the phone, making it feel awkward, so she ended it as clearly as she could. “So, uh, there you have it. We fucked.”

“Jesus Christ.”

That wasn’t Richie. It could only be –

“Eddie, what the fuck are you doing on the phone?” Clearly now, the furniture Richie had knocked into was Eddie’s elbow into his ribs.

“We’re both been here,” Eddie replied. Beverly could imagine it, the two idiots sitting side by side, ears up against the phone between them. Beverly was a little startled by how deep Eddie’s voice had gotten just since last May. Alas, he and Richie would both be 16 just a month after next, when she turned 16. It was about time his voice dropped.

“Thanks a lot, Tozier.”

“My pleasure.” Richie’s voice; also a little deeper than she remembered. Had it been that long since he called?

“Well, it’s nothing to make a big deal about. It was just... practice. And actually, it was *my* pleasure this morning.” She hoped Bill’s self-esteem would boost through word of mouth. She could hear Eddie practically gagging.

“The fuck you practicing for, an audition? Ow –“ Another elbow from Eddie. “Well, at least tell me there’s some sort of marathon, I’m totally down to sign up. Stop – fucking – *nudging me*.” He struggled a bit while he wrestled with Eddie on the other line. Beverly rolled her eyes.

“Boys, can we please be civil?” *And find every excuse possible to touch each other. Idiots.*

“Richie is being an ass.”

“No shit, Eddie, he’s a trashmouth, what do you expect?” She fiddled with the strings on her hoodie, wondering how much they had changed in appearance since she last saw them. “It was just... nice to be touched the way I wanted for once.”

She didn’t really expect those words to come out, but there they were. She could tell Richie had almost said something, but silenced himself. By what, she didn’t know for sure, but she could guess it was by whatever look Eddie had on his face. Eddie never had to say a word, but Beverly knew Eddie felt the same way she did, and was probably aching to be as close to Richie as possible even then, whether or not either of them realized it. Beverly wasn’t mean or prejudiced, but... she could just tell with Eddie. The way his eyes would dart towards good-looking guys the same way their friends would at girls, the way that teenage boys do without realizing it, just reacting to their hormones. Richie, oh boy, he definitely liked the ladies. But there was always something with him and Eddie... he was always so protective of Eddie.

“Bev?”

She came back to the present. "Sorry, Eddie. I'm here."

"Richie went to grab some snacks."

"Oh." She paused. Then: "How you holding up, hun?"

She heard Eddie fidgeting on the other end. "Ok, I guess. What about you?"

"Ok, I guess," she said, smiling. It would be a long time before either of them were "OK," but small moments of happiness were something.

"How do you feel after... that?"

She bit her lip. "Better. I think. It's one less fear I have."

"Honestly... I think that's pretty brave of you."

"Really? You don't think it's slutty?" she said, half-joking.

"Are you kidding me? I would never think of you that way. You could screw ten guys this weekend, and it wouldn't matter."

"Ew, Eddie. What about the germs?" she teased.

"Ugh, stop. I'm just saying. At least it was... I mean, you wanted to do it. Not the way it was..."

"No," she agreed. "Not like that. Not like that at all."

Eddie was quiet on the other end. She wasn't even sure if Eddie knew what he was feeling. She thought for a minute and finally said, "Hey, Eddie?"

"Yeah?"

"Whatever you're feeling is OK. I don't know how you feel anymore than you know how I do, but no matter what, it's OK. All your anxiety and sadness, the depression that comes from what happened, they all lie. They make you feel like there's something wrong with you, but there's not. Don't be ashamed of anything you feel, OK? There's no normal in any of this. No matter how fucked up you feel,

you can get through this. You're amazing. You're a survivor. And Eddie," she said, her voice breaking a little. "You are so loved. You know that. No matter how far I am from you guys, and no matter how impossible it may feel... to *be with* someone, you are loved." She couldn't see the silent tears coming down Eddie's cheeks, but she heard a faint snuffle. She hoped to god that, if not today, then someday, the message would sink in. And maybe Richie would get a clue. But for now, just for now, just for Eddie and his healing heart, Bev knew she could sleep well after today. "You're going to be OK, Eddie. I love you."

She could almost feel his smile and his warmth when he said, "I love you, too."

Notes for the Chapter:

In case anyone is wondering:

Birthdays:

Bill's: Jan 4

Bev's: Feb 13

Eddie's: March 6 (I couldn't SWORN this information was available until recently, as the wiki now says Sept but I refuse)

Richie: March 7 (Yup, the next day)

Ben: June 2

Mike: July 3

All in 1976. I know wiki says Stan is too, but he's a year younger in the books, so: July 13, 1977. It messes up the Bar Mitzvah story line a bit, but oh well.

4. Say Yes

Summary for the Chapter:

Prom and grad parties - Richie and Eddie's last week as high school boys.

Notes for the Chapter:

Happy Thanksgiving - enjoy!

June 1994

Eddie couldn't tell you how many doctors' offices he had been to in his short, young life. It brought him comfort when others were surely annoyed or anxious because here is where he found out what was wrong, *if* something was wrong. For the last 3 years, there hadn't been a whole lot, because instead of his mother being there insisting persistently that there absolutely was *something*, it was now his aunt rolling her eyes at his listing off various symptoms, saying something along the lines of, "Are you *sure*, Eddie?" until he admitted maybe whatever happened was psychosomatic or an underlying symptom of his constant anxiety.

Today, Eddie Kaspbrak was alone, determined to begin some errands independently without letting his nerves get the best of him, letting his aunt's advice guide him, preparing himself for his move to New York in the upcoming months. He was heading there with an academic scholarship offered to a sole student per graduating class, and he was encouraging Stanley to work his ass off and follow him down the year after. However, it was not enough to cover dorms. His mother's will opened an account for him on his 18th birthday, which was not much to survive on alone, but Richie promised he'd be by his side every step of the way.

“Chicago has that cool improv stuff, though,” Eddie was saying to Richie several months ago, during a strangely adult conversation they were having on Richie’s bedroom floor. “Like, Second City and all those places.”

Richie shrugged. “Saturday Night Live is there and all those late night show hosts get comedians on all the time. Plus, look how long Seinfeld has been on. He’s doing pretty well. Besides, I can’t do improv; I let slip once I suck your dick on the reg, you’re gonna kill me.”

Eddie turned red. “I wouldn’t kill you. Maybe I’ll be ready to be out after we move.”

Richie looked up from a meticulously structured budget sheet Stan had made them to work out what kind of apartment they could afford with living expenses. “I don’t want to force you, Eds.”

“You haven’t been; you’re not. I’m just... tired,” he sighed.

“Edward!”

Eddie shot up from his seat in the waiting area and followed the nurse in. She checked his vitals and he smiled when she let him know he’d grown since last visit, finally kicking his five-foot-seven rut in the ass. “Pulse still a little high, though,” she said, frowning. “Anything bothering you today, hun?”

“Didn’t think there was,” he said, but he was almost perpetually anxious, even when he felt calm, it was like a baseline.

Sometimes when Eddie didn’t even realize it, Richie would pause his movements when his palm brushed over one of Eddie’s pulse points and distract him with breathing techniques he had read from a magazine while waiting for Eddie during his appointments at therapy. Richie, with his impulsivity and boisterous energy, laying there calmly, stroking Eddie’s curling hair and breathing deliberately into his skin in a way Eddie could follow, voice calm and steady in

his ear until he felt Eddie's heart relax to a normal beat.

Eddie was practicing his breathing exercises when his doctor came in; Dr. Asfe had replaced his former physician the second Aunt Judy came into the picture, because she just couldn't trust anyone willing to prescribe whatever his mother wanted just because she had asked.

"Morning, Eddie," she said pleasantly, looking over his chart. She was younger than doctors his mother had preferred, maybe in her late 30s. "College physical today? Awesome," she grinned, pulling out a clean scope to check him out. "Where'd you get in?"

"NYU," he said proudly.

"Very nice. Congratulations." She checked the light of her scope before checking one of his ears. "You gotta get a Hep B today. Nothing major."

"Another vaccine? I already had that I thought?"

"It's just a booster. College needs the Hep B and meningitis, usually." She switched sides to check his other ear. "Excited about prom this weekend?"

"Yeah, I guess," he said.

"Got a date? Look forward for me, honey."

He stared ahead passed the light causing his pupils to dilate and constrict as she moved it side to side. "I'm just going with a friend." *Boyfriend*, but she didn't need to know that.

"Sexually active yet?"

His eyes shot right to meet hers. She never directly asked him this before, and he wondered if she had always assumed the answer was no.

"What counts?"

The faint surprise on her face confirmed his theory. "Anything involving penis or vagina," she said nonchalantly. "Doesn't matter

what's going where."

Huh. Richie had a point. "Then... yes."

She raised her eyebrows in an almost "Damn, good for you, kid," kind of way before feeling his jaw and throat for tenderness or abnormalities. "Just make sure you practice safe sex, especially when you go off to college. You can usually get free condoms in a lot of clinics. Get tested between partners. You never know who could end up with syphilis or HIV."

Eddie felt the familiar panic of his hypochondria settling into his veins, the feeling of ice cold filling his gut. "You don't just get HIV, right? You have to get it from someone's blood or having sex with someone with it?"

"Well," she said, checking various reflexes. "There are risk factors to look out for. IV drug users, needle sharing, men who have sex with men, or being with a *girl* who had sex with a man who had sex with men, those sorts of things."

Heart beat quickening. Mouth dry. "How? How do gay men just get HIV?"

Her jaw clenched slightly at his tone, not meeting his eye. "It's just statistically more likely for them, Eddie; nothing to worry about."

"But – but what if I'm around a gay person –" Eddie was always around one, he *was* the gay person. What was it, some fucked up mutation in your genes for having the *audacity* to not be able to be attracted to women? And she didn't just say *gay* men, she very specifically said men who have sex with men, which included Richie. Were they both fucked, at risk of developing HIV or AIDS for just existing?

"Eddie," she said sternly, not covering annoyance. "It's not a cold. No blood, no semen, no AIDS, got it? There's no need to be afraid of gay people, they're not all Robert Gray." She paused, realizing what she said. "Sorry."

Eddie looked at her face, noticing the lines in her expression showing

some disappointment and – was that fear? He felt a memory pull itself out from old neurons in his brain, his mother's voice speaking to him as they saw the new doctor pulling out of the Meadow Brooks Apartment Complex on the outskirts of Derry, saying, "Like we can't tell what her and her *roommate* really are. I guess they'd give anyone a medical degree in India," and Eddie was then profoundly reminded of the fact that Meadow Brooks had only one-bedroom apartments, and Dr. Asfe had several times in the past mentioned a roommate named Natalia and their shared orange Persian cat.

"I'm not afraid of gay people," he said apologetically. It was mostly true, he certainly wasn't afraid of his doctor, but he was afraid of himself and she certainly had not put him at ease yet with her response, because he certainly never used condoms. He didn't quite know how to say, 'No anal sex for me because of my traumatic rape, doc, but you mentioned semen and I can't help but notice I can't keep my hands off my boyfriend because apparently when we're alone I develop a sexual appetite for his dick like a catholic rabbit.' He didn't say any of that and was quiet while she listened to his breathing, "Deep breaths in and out," she was saying all quiet and business like, and he felt his heart beat quickening again when he said to her quietly, "Let's just say I was... gay. How do I make sure I don't get it? Or my boyf – or the guy I'm with – or the guy I *would be* with if I was gay?"

Her expression finally softened, pulling the ear pieces of her stethoscope out, scanning his face. "Can you guess how many patients I treat think to use condoms if they think they won't get pregnant, or won't get someone pregnant?"

Eddie shook his head.

"Not a lot. Once people don't see pregnancy as a factor, you know, pretty much the one thing parents and school warn them about because none of them want to deal with a pregnant teen or a whole new accidental baby, or maybe they're dumb enough to think a certain sex position will prevent them from conceiving, people often don't think about the other consequences. So, you can imagine a lot of gay men, who literally *can't* get pregnant or won't get someone pregnant, may not think they need a condom. With me so far?" Eddie nodded.

“Before the AIDS epidemic, people didn’t worry about AIDS because, well, they didn’t know it existed. The fear didn’t exist yet. Hell, the education still doesn’t. There wasn’t anything to protect them from.”

Eddie nodded again.

“So it’s not like you just get HIV from having sex as a gay man. There was just a variable we didn’t know existed yet until it spread too much too quickly. It spread quicker through the gay community because, often, gay men, and frankly men in general, just didn’t think a condom was necessary. You understand?”

Eddie sighed. “Yeah.”

She nodded this time. “So if... if you *were* gay, then as long as you don’t have it already, and you know your partner doesn’t have it, and you get checked between partners and use condoms for penetrative sex, you shouldn’t have anything to worry about.”

“Thanks, doc.”

She smiled, and he knew by the look in her eyes that she knew, but he smiled back wordlessly.

“You want an STD panel to make yourself feel better?”

“Yes, please.”

Eddie fixed his bow tie in the mirror, Richie’s long arm dangling over his shoulder, a lit joint stuck out of the space between his grinning teeth. “What a fucking stud muffin,” he said before sucking in, the tip of the joint brightening as he inhaled.

“Flattery isn’t going to make me any less annoyed when we’re not allowed in prom for smelling like skunk.”

“Flattery? I was talking about myself,” he said, adjusting his collar and winking at Eddie’s reflection. “You’re hella cute, though.”

Eddie huffed, *adorably*, Richie would add. "I'm not cute." He snatched Richie's pot from him, taking a hit for himself. God, he hated the taste and the raw burn at the back of his throat, but he knew he'd relax a bit.

"Easy, Eds" Richie said, pulling the dying roach off of Eddie's lips, taking one last drag before tossing it in the toilet. He flushed over the faint sound of a car honking outside. "Ben will have an aneurysm if we stink up his stupid fucking car."

Eddie made sure to grab the disposable camera his aunt left before her night shift, peeling off the post-it that read, *Take lots of pictures, handsome!* He grabbed his house key just before feeling himself being lifted into the air as Richie scooped him up.

"Richie, what the fuck?"

"I'm carrying you through the threshold," Richie said, awkwardly opening the front door with the arm cradled under Eddie's back, the other under Eddie's knees.

"That's for marriage, you idiot," Eddie laughed, throwing his arm around Richie's shoulder, enjoying the affection and excuse just to have Richie holding him before they were surrounded by their classmates.

Richie kicked the door open, both of them expecting to see three young men awaiting for them, perhaps crammed in Ben's Ford Taurus, but instead came to confront the redheaded, freckled-face smile of –

"BEVVY!" Richie screamed, promptly *dropping* his boyfriend, Eddie falling to a yelp and a thud on the porch. Rich ran out to Bev, smiling like a dork, arms outstretched, lifting her up in the air in a giant hug. "Holy shit, you made it!"

"Surprise!" she screamed over his shoulder, laughing as Eddie fixed his suit.

Eddie wasn't even annoyed, but ran out to catch Beverly in another hug as Richie set her down.

“Holy shit, Bev,” he said, squeezing her tight, actually the slightest bit *taller* than her, feeling her reaching up over his shoulder even though she was wearing fucking heels. “I can’t believe you’re here. Wasn’t your prom tonight?” he asked, stepping back to look at her.

“Change of plans,” they heard Ben, leaning out of his driver’s window with a huge grin.

“Fuck my prom,” Beverly said. “Losers stick together.”

“Fuck yes!” Richie exclaimed. He and Eddie felt like they were bursting with fucking sunshine; the lucky 7 would be together again.

“Where’s Stanley?” Eddie asked, squeezing in the back next to Bill, Richie following behind him.

“Sara picked him up,” said Bill. “M-Mike is picking up Olivia and they’re gonna meet us there.”

Bill would be going stag, partially because Richie and Eddie were posing as such, and partially because he was pretentious enough to think it made him look cool and mysterious or whatever the fuck writers were trying to be.

Beverly and Richie insisted on Beastie Boys and sharing about how fucking *done* they were with Maine, the others in agreement, Eddie occasionally pulling Richie back down to a safe position in the back seat where he can just hold his fucking hand and force him to sit still so Eddie had a shoulder to rest his head. Beverly was twisted in her seat so she could see them properly, absolutely glowing and warm.

Richie, Eddie, and Bill just kept getting taller and less-cherub faced every time Beverly came to visit, but the fuzzy happiness she felt visiting her friends never faltered. It was strange to see them practically looking like *men*, albeit super gangly, Eddie having the audacity to grow *stubble*, and Richie’s facial features sharpening to the point he could practically cut a bitch with his jaw line. Ben kept looking at her fondly now and then while he drove to the school, giving her butterflies every time they locked eyes. His body had trimmed, his face had thinned, but they were the same wonderful eyes full of poetic beauty.

The car was full of future New Yorkers – Ben would be attending Cooper Union for architecture; Bill would be starting at Columbia for what Richie called a “promising career in his native language,”; Beverly had joined the list of future fashion designers of America when she enrolled at Pratt Institute; Eddie would be flocking with fellow math nerds at NYU; Richie, well, Richie would be spending weekends cracking jokes at sleazy bars and his week nights at BMCC taking occasional classes in –

“Psychology?” Beverly asked, dumbstruck. “What are you going to do with *psychology*, Richie?”

“Bev,” Richie said, affectionately taking her hand over the back of her seat. “The true art of comedy is stemmed from tragedy and the human psyche. I’m not just going to make people laugh, I’m going to *make* them laugh, and I will be a fucking god a manipulation on the stage.”

“Yeah, you’re going to be a real master psychologist taking two courses at community college,” Bill scoffed.

“Don’t mock cheap school, Bill,” Eddie chimed in to Richie’s defense. “He still needs to be my sugar daddy and pay the bills.”

There came a point in the night when Eddie stopped caring about his classmates watching him, if they even bothered to notice, because he’d never see any of them again after July, and he couldn’t think of a better feeling than swinging around playfully with Richie to Salt n’ Pepa and Culture Beat and listening to him and Mike belting out loudly to Whitney Houston’s “I Will Always Love You.”

Beverly grabbed onto Eddie to dance, pushing Richie away so she could have her turn.

“Is this the tango?” Eddie laughed, completely sure this was *not* the right way to dance to Snoop Doggy Dog.

“Just dip me, Eddie!” she squealed, and he obliged, swinging her

down and knocking his leg into someone as he held onto her.

Bill and Ben were actually dancing together with Mike and his date, Olivia, and Eddie briefly locked eyes with Richie across the gym. He was standing with Stan near the refreshments, talking to Stan through a grin as he watched Eddie and Beverly dancing. There seemed to be some silent agreement between them that they would try to knock into as many other dancers as possible while Eddie spun Beverly around with wide and exaggerated twirls. He was on cloud nine. Soon, the song was changing and he watched Stan walk out with his date, laughing as Richie had wrapped an arm around him and left a wet smooch on his cheek, pulling him into a wild dance to Coolio's *Fantastic Voyage* and he couldn't even get upset because *fuck this place*, they were finally leaving and never turning back.

"Holy shit, Richie, how many stores do we need to go into?"

This was probably the 5th place Richie had dragged Ben into, and Ben had been so busy rambling on about his architecture program that he didn't notice until just now that Richie had not bought a single thing, but kept hustling down candy isles like a madman and leaving each place with more and more annoyance.

"When is Mike going to start applying to schools?" Richie asked as though he didn't hear Ben, digging through another candy box.

Ben shrugged. "Same time as Stan, I think." Mike was staying behind in Derry to help his grandfather out while they looked for new hands on the farm, and to keep Stan from going insane in Derry by himself. "I'll follow you guys to New York," he told them. "Just think about all the history museums!"

"He could always stay a working man like me," Richie was saying, grabbing the entire box of candy and lifting it up into the air. "Excuse me?" he called to the cashier. "Do you have any more of these somewhere?"

The man looked up from a newspaper and shook his head.

“Fuck.” Richie crammed the box back onto the shelf. “Eddie only likes the blue raspberry.”

Ben gestured to the wide variety of other candies in the store. “Dude, they have like 10 different blue raspberry candies here, just get something else.”

“It has to be a ring pop,” said Richie. “Which reminds me... can I ask you a favor?”

“Sure,” said Ben.

Richie sighed, biting his bottom lip, which looked a little raw from him chewing on it already. “Do you mind if I make a grand gesture at your party tomorrow?”

Ben squinted his eyes suspiciously at him. “That depends... is it going to give my mother a heart attack?”

“No, but Eddie might have one.”

Ben stared at Richie for a moment before it clicked. “Oh. OH. OH!” He started shaking Richie’s shoulders. “Are you serious?! Of course I wouldn’t mind! Holy shit! This is amazing!”

“Easy, Haystack,” Richie laughed, shaking Ben off. “Don’t give yourself an aneurysm before you can follow our footsteps and get with Bev, already.”

Ben blushed. “Listen, I’m working on it. But it’s been about double the amount of time for you and Eddie, so don’t even compare the two.”

“Do you think it’s stupid?” Richie asked, suddenly shrinking into himself, slightly insecure. “Like, I don’t even know if we’ll be able to get married any time soon.”

“So, you’ll have plenty of time to plan a ceremony. You got to do what makes you two happy. Here,” he said, leaning down and grabbing a single blue raspberry ring pop that Richie’s bad eyesight

didn't catch. "Here's your something blue."

Richie beamed and grabbed the candy ring excitedly. "Finally. We just need to get a card."

Now he was shaking, his leg jittery and bouncing up and down and wondering how his electrified nerves weren't shaking the whole damn tree he was leaning on in Ben's backyard. Their graduation was over, the sun was setting, the BBQ was cooling down and Mrs. Hanscom was pulling out a cake from the fridge that she had purchased the afternoon before. Mike and Eddie were talking about Speed, but Eddie insisted he couldn't take the main guy seriously after watching Bill & Ted's Excellent Adventure about 50 times with Richie.

"Gather round, boys!" Mrs. Hanscom called, closing the back door behind her with a large cake in her grip. "Time for some dessert!"

"N-no cake for you, Stan," Bill said, shoving Stan back playfully as they sat around the backyard table, Mrs. Hanscom setting down the blue-frosted cake with large purple letters reading, "Congrats, Grads!"

"Here, Eddie," said Ben, placing Eddie down in front of the cake and pulling out a card.

"What's this?" Eddie asked.

"A little extra for being such a smart-ass," Mike said, grinning. "Congrats little valedictorian."

Eddie blushed. "You guys didn't have to get me a freaking card," he said, ripping open the envelope.

"Read it aloud," Beverly said as Ben sat next to her and wrapped his arm around her.

"I don't want to hear whatever raunchy shit Richie wrote in there after us," Stan said. "I know that's why he signed it last."

“You should read it anyway,” Ben said.

Richie made his way over to them, keeping quiet and standing just a bit behind Eddie, feeling his heart pounding aggressively through his chest.

“We’re so proud of you, honey,” Eddie was reading, his ears now reddening with embarrassment as badly as his cheeks. *“You’re gonna knock college out of the park; Can’t wait to see where it takes you. Love you always. Thanks Bev,”* he smiled at her. He read on similar words of congratulations and pride, feeling a bit overwhelmed. *“I’m still smarter than you. Fuck you, Stan.”*

“I have to keep your ego in check,” Stan replied, smirking.

“Eddie, oh god,” Eddie continued. It was Richie’s handwriting, and he had written Eddie instead of Eds, which always made him nervous. *“I know I’m not the best with this serious stuff, but I wanted you to know how damn proud I am to have someone as clever and smart as you love me,”* Eddie could feel his eyes stinging with stupid, hopelessly romantic tears and he wanted to punch Richie for causing this reaction in front of their friends. *“You’re going to do amazing things, and I want to make this promise that I will always be by your side and follow you wherever you go. You’re everything to me, but there’s one more thing I want us to be; as long as you say yes.”* Eddie blinked in confusion. “Wait, what?”

He looked up to see the faces of the Losers and Ben’s mom looking awestruck, Beverly and Ben with joyful tears in their eyes, Ben’s suspiciously unsurprised, but all eyes were looking past Eddie toward the ground behind him. He turned and looked down to see Richie, looking scared and desperate and *in love*, down on his knee and holding a giant blue candy ring.

“Eds,” said Richie. “Will you – ARGH!”

Eddie had tackled him before he could finish, smothering him with a love-sick stupid sloppy kiss, Richie laughing blissfully into his lips.

“Of course I will, you fucking idiot!” Eddie squealed, holding Richie’s face in his hands, planting more kisses on him.

“Somebody stop them before I have to bleach my eyes,” Stan was saying from the table, but for once with an adoring kind of look on his face as Bill and Mike started whooping next to him.

Beverly was crying, clutching Ben’s arm with such warmth in her eyes, and Ben turned to his mother, about to fervently apologize to his mother for not warning or explaining the true nature of Eddie and Richie’s relationship beforehand, but she was laughing, and when she caught Ben’s eyes, she smiled and mouthed, “I fucking *knew* it!”

Notes for the Chapter:

80s/90s dance music is the best, yo.

5. Oh, Canada

Summary for the Chapter:

The Losers take a trip to Canada; Ben and Beverly make a deal.

Notes for the Chapter:

Backtracking a little to the events before the prom. The Losers skip school for Eddie and Richie's birthdays.

March 1994

Richie was *too tall*, Beverly was thinking, watching his stupid long feet tugging the tarp over four of them in the truck bed and slipping down their heads.

"Richie, can you do something with your *legs*?" she heard Stan fuss under the tarp, shoving his own into Richie's.

"What exactly would you like me to do with them, Einstein?" Richie protested, twisting in the truck bed to flatten his body out. "Mike, we're gonna be getting cozy."

Beverly heard Mike groan on the other side of Richie, and a sharp yelp of pain. "That was my DICK, Tozier!"

"Hold still so I can cuddle you then."

"Wrap your octopus arms around Stan, then; you keep kneeing my balls, Richie."

"This is exactly how I wanted to take advantage of my weight loss," Ben said, voice muffled as his body pressed into the side.

"This isn't going to work," Eddie said next to Beverly, shaking his head. "We're going to get blacklisted in Canada because of Lurch,

here.”

They were about a half hour from the Quebec/Maine border, and they were trying to hide four of them in the bed of Mike’s grandfather’s pickup truck (“Which only Bill will drive!”) Mike, Ben and Stan were still underage, and Richie had too much difficulty getting a passport in time, thus, forcing them to be snuck across the border.

“It was *your* idea to do this, Trashmouth,” Stan had nagged the day before. “Why didn’t you at least get a passport so you could ride up front *away* from me?”

“You children don’t *have* to come,” Richie teased, going to tousle Stan’s hair, but receiving a slap on his wrist.

“*You* need a babysitter.”

The drinking age in Quebec was 18. Eddie had just became of age the day before, and it was now Richie’s birthday, and this was possibly the last chance they’d be able to attempt this very horrible idea to cross the border and legally get drunk in Montreal’s finest alcoholic establishments. Bill managed to shut the boys up and keep them still under the tarp, tightening the strap from the bed in the most inconspicuous way possible.

“We’re going to get arrested,” Eddie said wearily.

They made them stay under the tarp until they got a bit further from the border, and they were soon checked into their two small rooms at a hotel of Richie’s choosing. They snuck the minors in on the side of the building and up to the top floor to their rooms. Bill, Ben, Mike and Stan dragged their luggage into their room while Beverly followed Richie and Eddie into theirs.

“Oh, sweet Canada,” Richie sighed, throwing his duffle bag on one of the queen beds. “I am so ready to be drunk inside of you.”

“Hey, Eddie,” said Bev, grinning and gesturing for Eddie to come to the window with her. “Wanna take a good look at Ville-Marie?”

Eddie made his way over to the window. He pulled back the curtain to see the front end of the street and saw an assortment of colorful shops and bars and some of them even adorning rainbow flags.

“Welcome to Gay Village,” chuckled Bev.

“Fuck off; that’s not actually what it’s called, is it?”

“That’s what the concierge called it,” she said, shrugging. “Or just ‘The Village.’ No rednecks and small town hicks throwing beer cans at you for holding your boyfriends hand.”

“All right,” they heard Stan behind them, and they all turned to see him coming in wearing one of Eddie’s fanny packs. “I’ve got mints, Pepto-Bismol, Dramamine, plastic bags to catch vomit, water, and caffeine pills.”

“Aw, Stan,” Richie cooed, batting his eyelashes. “You’re such an angel. I promise not to puke on you when you’re holding my hair back.

“Jesus Christ,” Stan exclaimed hours later, Richie’s vomit dripping off his jeans, holding Richie steady by the waist as he continued puking outside the hotel. “I fucking told you to quit before last call.”

“Last call is for pussies!” Eddie shouted, stumbling into a sober and exhausted Ben, who had Beverly clinging to his arm.

“Steady, Eds,” Ben was saying, both concerned and amused, going to grab onto Eddie before he drunkenly wobbled over to Stan.

“Staaaaan,” Eddie whisper-shouted directly into Stan’s face, who reeled back from Eddie’s beer-breath. “Did I tell you how much I adore you?” He planted a sloppy kiss on Stan’s cheek.

“Thanks,” said Stan, calmly pushing Eddie back. “Just try to hold your liquor a little better than your boyfriend.”

Eddie grinned, throwing a thumbs up and said enthusiastically, “You got it, dude.” He promptly threw up on Stan’s shoes.

Ben gently swung the hotel room door open, keeping the light from reaching Mike and Bill’s shared bed. They were both lightly snoring.

“Do you need to throw up?” Ben asked Beverly quietly, helping her over to his bed.

She shook her head, briefly giving off the scent of her shampoo; peaches & honey. Ben desperately wanted to run his hand through her hair, bury his face into it like he dreamt about thousands of times. Instead, he sat her down on the bed, kneeling down to help take her shoes off.

“Well, our bathroom is open. The lover’s next store will probably be a handful for Stan. He’ll probably be in that bathroom all night judging by how hard those two went at it.”

Ben looked up to see Beverly staring at him. He felt his chest constrict. Her blue eyes felt like they were penetrating his soul, like she could sense his desire to reach up and kiss her. He thought about it now, eyes darting to her lips, soft and pink and parted slightly.

Ben cleared his throat. “I, uh, I can get you some clothes from your room to sleep in.” He started to get up, but Bev placed a gentle, warm hand on his shoulder.

“Why don’t you call anymore?” she whispered.

“I didn’t think you wanted me to,” Ben said truthfully. “I thought... you were getting kind of tired of me bothering you.”

His heart skipped about a thousand beats as he felt her hand brush his cheek. “January embers,” she whispered. Her eyes were

shimmering.

"You remember that?" he asked, letting out a small laugh. He had been so desperate to tell Beverly how he felt before all the horrible events with Robert Gray happened. It never seemed appropriate after, after she had been violated and after they had killed a grown man in a sewer. How do you ask a girl out after you both go on trial for killing her rapist and serial murderer.

"I'll never forget how it made me feel," she said now, smiling. "It made me feel so loved; not the way I was used to."

She bent down and he felt her breath reach his face, but Ben reached up to press his hand to her lips. "You shouldn't," he said.

Beverly leaned back again, looking puzzled and a little amused. "Always such a gentlemen."

"I'm serious, Bev," he said, getting up from the ground to sit next to her on the bed. "You're not thinking clearly. I don't want you to do anything you're going to regret in the morning."

Bev smirked. "You're always so good to me, Ben. I can't tell you how many times I've been around you drunk and you never take advantage of me."

Ben shrugged. "No one should get brownie points for *not* date raping someone. I don't deserve anything for being nice."

They sat there awkwardly for a moment, silent except for the faint sounds from the others in the room sleeping soundly. Finally, she asked, "Can you stay with me at least?"

He held her fondly in the bed without pressing too closely together. He allowed himself to stroke her hair. He wondered if they'd speak of this again or if this would fold itself up neatly with the other packaged memories of him revealing his true affections for her. He wondered if she really wanted to kiss him or if she just felt obligated to.

"How about this..." he began, pushing her red locks aside. "Let's go on a date: a real date. Dinner, a movie, whatever you want to do. We

do that a few times and you can tell me whether or not it's something we *really* want to do, or if we should just..." he trailed off, not knowing where they could go from there.

"Stay friends?" she suggested.

He decided he would be content with that. "Yeah. I don't mind. You're a good friend."

"You don't mind being just friends?"

"*Just* friends? Beverly, it's an honor to be your friend. It's never a *just*. Being friends is amazing; that goes for all of you guys. Losers for life, right?"

God, she loved him. She smiled. "Losers for life." She thought for a moment. "What does being your girlfriend entail?"

"Hmm. Prom?"

"Ugh," she groaned, chuckling a little bit. "Of *course* you'd want to go to a dance."

"Imagine they play the Macarena?"

Beverly covered her mouth to stop herself laughing too loudly and waking the others. "God, *no*. This sounds like the worst idea ever."

"Any worse than Mike and Richie getting Bill to dance to *Can't Touch This*?"

Beverly shook her head. "You guys are ridiculous."

Ben smirked. "Well, how does it sound? We date, you don't like it, and we stay friends and no prom. If the dates go well, we make a fool of ourselves at Derry High one last time? Deal?"

Beverly leaned in and snuck a small kiss on his lips, sneaking her pinky into his in a firm promise.

"Deal."

Notes for the Chapter:

Poor Stan. Bless him.

I've also never been to Quebec, so I didn't know how to it proper justice. Hope you enjoyed!

6. Eddie Kaspbrak, 22, Gay College Student

Summary for the Chapter:

Richie finds a way to bring Eddie closer, only to find it shatter after a tragic event.
But things get better.

Notes for the Chapter:

A second chapter today! Mostly because I had this chapter written a while ago.

Some of this is sexy.
Some of this is very sad.

Thanks for the love and kudos!

June 1994

This was a trust exercise.

Eddie had continuous issues when it came to sex. Sure, he climbed Richie like a goddamn tree any chance he could, but he was usually in control and sometimes he'd feel the sensation of panic when Richie touched him or climbed on top of him, unable to shake the feeling that it was *indecent* and he shouldn't be enjoying being touched like that. Eddie finally told his therapist that he'd find himself feeling guilty and cutting Richie off many times. He had to keep reminding himself that they were *Richie's* hands and not the ones that had hurt him years before. There was always something inside of him that prevented him from enjoying it too much, and if Eddie ever said stop, Richie would comply. But deep down Eddie knew that the only way to get passed this was to force him to... or at least have Richie force him.

It started because graduation was over and they were alone, and Eddie was lying on his stomach in nothing but boxers, having just finished the candy ring pop Richie proposed with that evening,

complaining that it was too cold in Richie's house. He assumed Richie had left only to bring him a tea that Richie had set down on the nightstand, not seeing Richie pull out the long sash of his bathrobe, but felt Richie crawl over him, planting small kisses on his shoulder.

"Hey, Eds," Richie whispered behind Eddie's ear. "Can I have you tonight?"

He felt Eddie tense up a little, but slowly relax. He started nibbling lightly on Eddie's ear until he heard him say, "Please."

Richie reached up and pulled Eddie's hands up in front of him, holding his hands together like in prayer and started tying them together in the sash. He felt Eddie gulp under him, but he said nothing else as he watched Richie reach up and tie the other end to Eddie's bedpost.

It was time to explore and expose. And by the wet beads of sweat dripping down Eddie's shoulder blades moments later, Richie happily assumed he was *not* cold anymore.

Eddie was pressed into the bed, moaning into the sheets to muffle his voice, hips arched up so Richie could wrap his hand around to his cock, his own hard as stone and pressing against Eddie's bare ass. Richie was momentarily breaking from nibbling on Eddie's skin by opening a bottle of lube, tearing the plastic with his teeth, then flipping Eddie over on his back. His arms were tied up above his head, giving him no way to stop Richie was doing whatever he wanted; all part of the whole trust thing. Richie wasn't allowed to ask, "Is this OK?" and Eddie was supposed to keep his mouth shut unless it was to shout their safety word, but he had so much trust in Richie he didn't think it would even be necessary. Richie knew exactly what was off the table and what drove Eddie crazy in that *good way*.

Richie slid his hand around his own shaft, making it slick with lube, and leaned down, pushing Eddie's legs up slightly for a good angle. He lowered his hips, briefly gripping both of them together to spread the lube between them then pushed down roughly, pressing their throbbing cocks together tightly between their hot bodies and thrusting, creating a stimulation of penetration with the friction

between them.

“*Rich,*” Eddie gasped, but Richie slapped his hand over Eddie’s mouth, sure he was going to protest his own pleasure (and possibly wake Richie’s sister), forcing him to only moan into Richie’s hand.

Richie could feel Eddie trembling under him, bucking his hips up to match Richie’s speed. Richie pressed his other hand down on Eddie’s thigh to keep him still. There was a small voice in his head that nagged him, telling him he shouldn’t be forcing his partner down and having his way with him, not after the kind of shit he went through as a kid. Another voice reminded him that Eddie was still 100% in control of this, able to stop it at any time with just one simple word, but he didn’t *want* to, cause just *listen to him moaning*. Richie grinded harder into Eddie, and Eddie’s noises beneath Richie’s palm became raw and guttural. Richie slid his hand off Eddie’s mouth just in case it was too much, but Eddie threw his head back in tense preparation and sounded *animalistic*. Richie reached his hand up to fist Eddie’s hair and mouthed at Eddie’s neck in a way that forced Eddie’s voice to reach whole new octaves as he was getting close to orgasm. Richie continued to grind their bodies together and he pulled back to lock his eyes into Eddie’s. He wasn’t sure what prompted him to do this next, but he snuck his hand around Eddie’s neck, squeezing the sides tightly so he could still breathe, but the pulse was pounding desperately against Richie’s hand restricting the blood flow. He watched Eddie’s eyes widen while whispering hoarsely, “*God I fucking love you.*” Just the look on Eddie’s face alone was enough to bring Richie to his own climax, and in seconds Eddie’s body curled up into Richie, unable to reach out and grab anything, and they were both spilling wet, hot cum onto each other.

Richie used his own shirt to clean them both off before chucking the filthy shirt onto the *floor* nowhere near the laundry basket. Richie helped undo the knots holding Eddie’s wrists, and he was rubbing them gently where the strings dug into his skin. Richie was watching him carefully as Eddie sipped the cooling tea with slightly aggressive desperation. “How are you feeling?”

Thankfully, Eddie grinned as he set his mug down, exhausted, and fell into Richie’s lips, tasting like Early Grey and blue raspberry candy. Richie reached up to stroke his face as they parted and Eddie

leaned into the touch, rolling his head down into Richie's chest. Richie leaned back so they were lying down, stroking Eddie's hair as they fell asleep. Richie drifted off thinking about how neither of them bothered to dress, the first of many times they'd sleep like this, a predecessor to continuing years of unflinching intimacy.

October 1998

It was too early in the morning (although it was almost 11am) and Richie had a cabinet full of coffee at home, the good shit that got you through late night routines at sketchy dive bars and comedy clubs and his shifts on late-night radio, but he found himself out of his apartment and groggily waiting for someone to serve him some shitty blend of hazelnut flavored bullshit. He wasn't used to Eddie being gone all day every day, but he knew this day would come as Eddie neared the end of his college education and began his internship with an Actuary (a fancy title for a risk-analyst).

Eddie had what he called a "small hiccup" before his junior year. "This is a mental breakdown, Eds," Richie had said to a sleep-deprived and hysterical Eddie pacing their apartment at 3 am one night, convincing him to drop his class schedule down to avoid his grades slipping and getting kicked off of his scholarship and out of college completely. "You need to get some shit together, get a new therapist like we've talked about for two fucking years and take care of yourself."

It was true. Eddie put off his mental health after moving to New York, thinking maybe the fresh start would be enough, but it slowly ate away at him because, well, he was just not *well*, at least not in a way that he could function without proper professional assistance and wellness checkups. But soon, Eddie was back in therapy, taking a healthy dose of anti-depressants and a CO2 inhaler for panic attacks. Richie assured him that taking his medicine was no more shameful than Richie needing his glasses, which Eddie could not argue with. Eddie was on track to graduate the same time as Stan, at least, and he was dealing with his stress much better. Eddie didn't very much like

the environment at his internship, which was *toxically* hyper masculine but it was experience he would have on a resume down the line.

“I just gotta keep my mouth shut and get this year done with,” he said to Richie after his first week. “But if anyone asks me, your name is Nancy and you have great tits.”

“Don’t forget an ass to match,” Richie said.

“I never forget,” Eddie said, winking.

Richie’s mind was foggy now, not knowing what to do with his day, wondering if his friend Charlie would want to catch a flick, but his thoughts crashed back into the coffee shop when he felt a particular trigger –

“ – faggot probably tried some shit with them. Don’t try that gay shit with me, man.”

Richie felt his neck crack, whipping his head sharply towards the word. Two college-aged guys were pushing their chairs in, making their way out, Richie desperately clinging to the tail end of their parting conversation.

“For real, man. Some fucking fairy tries to lay a finger on me I’m knocking his teeth in.”

Richie watched them leave; white-hot fury boiling in his chest, wanting badly to open his trashmouth and follow them out, but something caught his eye on the table they had just been occupying. He leaned over to read the article of the New York Times, which read, *Gay Man Beaten and Left for dead: 2 Charged*. He grabbed the newspaper, clutching it with an iron grip, skimming over the words with nausea threatening what bile was in his stomach. *Burned. Pistol-whipped. Battered. Nearly lifeless tied to a pole for 18 hours*. Richie’s eyes burned as he read about the man’s face covered completely with blood, except for clean streaks where tears had run down his face. Richie thought about Eddie and wanted to throw up again, wanted to chase down the two assholes that left for thinking this would even be remotely acceptable to do to someone for flirting with you, which

wasn't even the case according to what Richie read, as the assaulters had purposefully lured the man with the indication that they were gay themselves. He read the first sentence again. *Matthew Shepard, 22, gay college student.* Richie hunched over and threw up on the tile.

Richie's hand shook fumbling for his keys, muttering "fuck, fuck, fuck" over and over all the way up to their door from the street outside, finally managing to stick the right key through, attempting to twist it and push the door open with one smooth motion, but he ended up slamming into the door. The chain lock; Eddie was home.

Richie shut the door again and knocked aggressively. "Eds," he shouted. "Open up, it's just me."

It was quiet for longer than Richie wanted, and he about knocked again when he heard the scrap of metal indicating that Eddie was unlocking the door. It opened and Richie felt defeated the second he saw Eddie's face. He did not look Richie in the eye, but left the door ajar and slowly turned back, sauntering back to the couch. Richie stepped into their shitty studio, closing the door quietly behind him, making sure to at least click the lock.

"Hey, Eds," he said, quietly. "Whatcha doing home?"

Eddie ran his hands through his hair, laying down and not leaving anywhere for Richie to sit (he settled on the floor next to Eddie instead). "They were debating about it at work. *Debating.* Like, bad shit happens all the time, so why should this kid be special just because he's gay? That's what they were saying." Richie continued to watch Eddie's face, though he was still not looking at him. "Like, they were arguing that that's just what people do when they *rob* someone, completely missing that this guy was fucking tortured and will probably die, not because someone wanted his money but because he was *gay*. Fuck," Eddie scrunched his face. "Richie, I'm so fucking sick of being *scared*." His voice broke like a child's, tears rolling off his cheek, breaking Richie's heart into pieces. He reached out to Eddie's hand, but he flinched away from Richie's touch, crushing what was left of those pieces into dust.

Today, he was so utterly disgusted in himself he was afraid to even touch him. It had happened on and off while they were in high school while Eddie was battling with his demons. He had not once pulled away from Richie since they graduated; this hurt.

“Eds,” Richie whispered, tears forming back into his eyes as Eddie sobbed. “I’m never going to let anything happen to you. He was all alone... and that’s not his fault, but we can be so careful. Hell, I’ll sign us up for karate.”

Eddie sniffled, his lip quivering in a way that finally broke a tear from Richie’s eye. “I don’t want to be afraid of existing, Richie. I just want to wake up to over-fried omelets and Quantum Leap reruns with you. I just want to be domestic and unburdening to society. Why am I so fucking threatening?” He turned to Richie, large eyes shimmering.

“Probably because your tiny hyper ass could lay anyone out flat,” Richie joked, but was unable to hide the pain in his voice. Who could ever look at Eddie Kaspbrak’s beautiful doe eyes and adorable smirk and want to *hurt* him? “But seriously, Eds, it has *nothing* to do with you, you know that? It’s their problem, not yours.”

“It’s definitely my problem if I end up like that Shepard kid.”

Richie pursed his lips. “I won’t let that happen to you. Ever. No one will fucking lay a hand on you.”

He went to reach for Eddie’s hand again, but Eddie balled it into a fist and brought it up to his chest.

“You can’t promise that.”

No, he damn well couldn’t.

Matthew Shepard died in the hospital. There was talk about hate-crime legislation from Washington, and the two men that attacked Matthew were charged with first-degree murder, risking the death penalty.

“*Gay panic?*” Richie asked, incredulous, setting his beer down on his

table. “What the *fuck* does that mean?”

Stan drew a face of disgust. “That’s their defense. Supposedly, they say he flirted with them, which caused temporary insanity due to gay *panic* and that’s why they killed him.”

“Imagine if women did that every time a man gave us unwanted advances,” Bev said. “They’d probably cry about us being too sensitive, but the second a *man* flirts with a bigot, he sure as hell understands consent then.”

“It’s fucking bullshit,” said Richie. He was a little bit drunk and a lot bit angry. He looked up at Eddie who was quiet and contemplative on their couch, stroking the stem of a dollar store wine glass. “He didn’t even do anything to them, they lured him like poachers.”

Eddie pressed the bridge of his nose between his fingers. “Maybe we should stop talking about it.”

“No way,” said Stan, surprising them a bit. “I’m not going to shut up about this prejudiced bullshit. It’s no different than racism or anti-Semitism or any of that shitty way of thinking. I swear to god I’ll punch anyone that says some homophobic fuckery.”

Richie felt a great admiration for Stan at this moment, but Eddie still looked downtrodden. He hadn’t so much as let Richie hug him or hold his hand, choosing to sleep facing away from him every night instead of his usual position curled up against Richie’s back with his slender arms wrapped around Richie’s waist.

“I haven’t felt this shitty in a long time,” he said, sinking lower into the cushions.

“You know that girl Patty I started seeing?” asked Stan, turning directly to Eddie.

“The one you met at Jack’s party?” asked Beverly.

“Yeah, her.” He didn’t let his eyes leave Eddie. “Her brother is gay; a gay Jew, of all things. So when she started school, she went into the LGBT organizations as an ally, really interested in helping out.” He got up and made his way to Eddie, sitting directly against him. Eddie

leaned away into the armrest, but Stan placed his hand firmly on Eddie's shoulder. "Do you know how many people have been standing up for this guy? There are *thousands* of people, just in this city sticking up for him and fighting to make things better. And Eddie," Stan reached up to pull Eddie's chin to face him. "Things *will* get better. They're probably always going to suck, but they'll get better."

There was a pause.

"Thousands, huh?" Eddie asked quietly.

Stan smiled. "There are going to be so many people fighting to make things better. You should go to one of her groups one day, listen to all the insane stories and laws coming together. And you always have us; I'll never stop sticking up for you."

Stan hugged Eddie; Richie actually felt his jaw drop. He hadn't seen Stan give a proper hug in *years*, having become strictly verbal when it came to affection since that day in the sewer. But there he was, wrapping his arms around Eddie properly, firmly, and holding onto Eddie affectionately. Eddie did not let go of his wine glass or reach up around Stan, but he settled his head down lightly onto Stan's shoulder, relaxing the most Richie had seen in days.

And it was contagious, that affection, that warmth and that comfort. Hours later, Richie would tell himself to thank Stan as he felt for the first time since he saw that newspaper Eddie's arms sneak around his waist in the bed. Richie reached down and brought Eddie's hand to his lips, kissing the knuckles lightly, and Eddie only squeezed him tighter, pressing himself against his back and sliding his legs between Richie's to tangle them together. He felt Eddie kiss the back of his neck, and he gave Eddie's hand another squeeze.

"I love you."

Eddie sighed into his skin. "I love you, too."

"I'll never let anyone hurt you, Eds."

Without pause, without doubt in his voice, Eddie replied, "I know,

'Chee.”

Notes for the Chapter:

Thoughts: Are the noncon warnings helpful for this fic, or could they be removed? I want more people to enjoy the fic, but I don't want to remove necessary triggers. Let me know!

7. Bora Bora After?

Summary for the Chapter:

Stanley meets a girl at a party.

Notes for the Chapter:

This came out later than I wanted, but hope you enjoy! Many thanks for the lovely comments and kudos!

September 1998

Stanley crept quietly down one of the 4th floor dorm halls, scanning the numbers for 408. Last night, he had met a freshman girl who he quietly stalked around a party for an hour before Eddie smacked him and told him to man up. But Stanley hadn't been nervous because he wanted to sleep with her; he was nervous because he could hear her quietly talking, expressing opinions and sharing jokes with some other party goers and he genuinely felt a need to get to know this girl. He had made himself out like an idiot with girls he hooked up with, but it was a different story if he wanted to go out with her; he didn't think he had a chance.

"She sounds like a huge nerd and you're an accounting major," Eddie said, rolling his eyes. "What better chance do you have?"

So their friend Jack introduced them. Stanley coolly asked her for a drink. She just wanted a water, she had said. "Babysitting" her roommates in case they needed a sober helping hand. Smart, Stanley thought. They slowly wandered away from their mutual friends and talked for hours. She wanted to work with kids. She always wanted to go to Bora Bora. She went to an all-girls Jewish high school. Before he knew it, one of her friends started crying and Stanley watched her trying to depart, shoving napkins in her friends face to blow her nose.

"Can I have your number?" Stanley asked.

He couldn't read the expression on her face, but she reached down

into her purse and took out a sharpie, grabbing his arm and wrote down just three numbers: 408. Stanley stared at it with a perplexed expression for a moment just before she flashed him a bright smile and waved goodbye, dragging her whining friend away. Stan was quite certain he was in love.

“What the fuck is this supposed to mean?” Stanley asked, desperately shoving his arm in Eddie’s face. “Jack, do you know?” Stanley asked, turning to their friend. Jack was in economics, sharing familiar and difficult math courses with Eddie and Stanley; one of them had to be smart enough for this.

Jack shrugged. “Beats me, man. Maybe she’s fucking with you. I only know her through Lisa.”

“Eddie?” Stan asked again, looking desperately at him. He had a sick feeling that he couldn’t stand to not see this girl again.

Eddie tilted his head slightly, a thoughtful look on his face. “It’s either really ballsy or a risky set up.”

“What do you mean?”

Eddie looked up at him. “Where did she say she was from?”

“Queens.”

“So she might be dorming. That’s probably her dorm room number. She’s either fucking with you or making you risk showing face right away.”

“Fuck,” muttered Stan. There was a wait-three-days protocol for phone numbers. How long were you supposed to wait to show up at someone’s fucking dorm room? It was so... direct.

He waited one night. It was now Sunday afternoon, and there he was reading dorm numbers hoping to god her face would be behind the right door. When he got to 408, he looked at the white board stuck up under the door knocker.

“Come back with a warrant.”

Stanley chuckled a little. He knocked. The door opened.

There she was, her short brown hair curling at her chin in small ringlets, still slightly disarray from sleep. She was wearing a Yeshiva University High School for Girls t-shirt and Felix the cat pajama pants. She looked sleepy and slightly startled.

“Hi, Patty.”

She grinned. “Hey, Stan.”

They took things slow; very, very slow. Patty told Stan almost right away that she was a virgin. Stan didn’t mind taking the physical slow, but he really wanted to start bringing her around to meet his friends. He finally decided to bring it up one day studying in her dorm.

“They *all* came to New York with you?” she asked, admiring such a strong bond.

“Not *with* me, per se. They were all a year ahead of me. The district offered a scholarship to the valedictorian for NYU, so Eddie and I both got it. The rest all went to different schools. But, we really wanted to stick together the best we could. We went through a lot.”

“Eddie was that uhm,” she paused, not knowing how to phrase what she was about to say.

“The little guy, yeah,” Stan said, smirking.

“Aw, yeah, he was cute,” she said absently, flipping a page in her notebook on the bed. She looked up at Stan and laughed. “In, like, an elfish kind of way, don’t be jealous.”

Stan didn’t reply to that, but moved on to, “Richie is a pain in the ass.”

“The one you claim is your best friend?” Patty said, laughing again.

“Well, he’s my pain in the ass.” Stan smiled. “He was the first kid to stick up for me in elementary school. No one in my grade wanted to be friends with the Jew. All the kids made fun of my Kippah. I hated that my parents made me wear it, but Richie encouraged me to wear it to piss them off, like it showed I wasn’t afraid of them.”

“Smart guy,” she said quietly, almost shy. She looked almost hurt. “Kids are awful. Adults can be just as bad. In high school, we’d always get harassed by the guys at the Italian deli across the street. Or pretty much anyone that came by during track meets.” They were both quiet for a moment, taking in their shared experiences of antisemitism in calm contemplation. Then, “So does Richie have a girlfriend?”

Stan rolled his eyes. “Why; you want to know if he’s cute, too?”

“I’m just trying to set some friends up with nice guys. People that would be friends with someone like you.”

Stan thought for a moment. “Richie is engaged.”

Patty raised her eyebrows. “Oh, wow. Good for him.” She sighed, flipping another notebook page, though she hadn’t been absorbing a single bit of information in quite some time. “I wish my brother could get married.”

“Why can’t he?”

“He – “ She paused, biting the tip of her index finger, nervous. “My brother... my brother is gay. My parents kicked him out when they found out and he shares some little apartment with a bi guy and his – girlfriend. She’s uh... transsexual? I don’t know, I’m just learning all these terms in the LGBT Support Group on campus.” She put her hand on her forehead, flushing a little bit. She didn’t look up at Stan, as though expecting him to be weirded out or disturbed. Instead, he was smiling.

“Richie is engaged to Eddie, you know.”

Patty looked up, blinking. “Wait, really?”

“Yeah. I got ordained last year so that I can marry them when, like,

they can get married. It just sucks, like you said, because they can't and they can't even really talk about their relationship at their jobs or anything."

Patty beamed at him. "You got ordained so you can marry your two best friends? That's... that's so sweet."

"I'm pretty sure Richie would be attracted to anything with a heartbeat," Stan laughed. "But he sure as hell loves Eddie."

He looked up as he heard Patty sit up and watched her scoot closer to him in bed. She was smiling, of course, as she usually did looking at him. She was about to kiss him as she traced his cheeks over small, rough marks he received nearly 10 years ago from strong hands gripping his face and digging their sharp nails into the skin. "Where'd you get these?" she asked, eyes darting from either side of his face in curiosity.

Stanley felt a familiar sensation of panic, gulping as though he could swallow it down into nonexistence. He remembered the conversation he had with Eddie roughly 6 years ago, when the wounds still felt fresh and raw. "...how do I explain that to someone without her being completely grossed out by *touching me*?" he had asked. He still didn't know.

"I don't really talk about it," he said bluntly.

She seemed taken aback for a moment, but her face softened into understanding. She lowered her hand to hold his, leaning in to offer a small peck on the lips. "Then we won't," she said simply.

August 20, 2002

It was just after midnight, officially making it the 20th. Patty and Stan both laid there, breathing heavy in their honeymoon suite. It was a small luxury they could afford for now. The ceremony was small, her parents petty about Stan's lack of finances and them getting married just after she graduated. When she suggested, "Bora

Bora?" after her dad asked where they thought about honeymooning, he laughed and retorted, "Try Six Flags."

Patty's arms were draped around Stan's waist. They were quiet for a bit before Patty finally spoke.

"That was, uh... something."

She felt Stanley jolt a little beneath her in a quiet laugh. "Might be a little late for refunds, sweetheart."

Patty lifted her head, grinning at her husband. "I didn't mean it like that, dummy. It was just... not what I expected. I feel like I made a bigger deal of it than it should have been."

Patty had went to their bed a virgin, in whatever definition you wanted to give it. A week before proposing, Stan had shared with her his darkest secret: that in the September after he turned 12, a maniac had taken him into a filthy sewer and violated him, forcing his first kiss on dirty pavement and his friends eventually finding him in the middle of being raped. Patty not only accepted and supported him, but she, too, had a secret; her uncle was a very, very bad man and created traumatic memories when she was a small child. She wanted to wait. She wanted to be sure.

"It's OK that you wanted to wait," Stanley was telling her now, stroking her hair and looking down at her fondly. "We have all the time in the world now." He leaned down and kissed her, gently at first, then more fervently as her hands guided down to areas she had been unfamiliar with until not long ago.

"God, I love you Stanley," she said, breaking away.

"I love you too, Patricia," he said grinning.

They did not get any sleep that night; he took her to bed on their wedding night and promised he would never hurt her; he never would.

July 2011

Patty sighed dramatically, stretching her arms around her laptop, staring at various flight prices, slightly suffocated by the mid-summer Georgia humidity. From 2002 until 2007 they did not go on their honeymoon; they were not financially stable enough if they wanted to get a house. Stanley got an offer in Atlanta, Patty taking a job at an elementary school nearby, and money started coming in. They were successful, happy. Stan only rubbed it in his father-in-laws face a little bit. They were just about ready to book a flight to Bora Bora for their 6th anniversary when Patty went in for her annual pap and got the surprising news that she was expecting. Then, November 5th, 2008, Wyatt Richard Uris came into their lives.

“Aw, you named him after his father,” Richie said with a wicked grin, winking at Patty in the nursery when they came to visit. Stanley smacked him the second he put his son in the crib.

Wyatt seemed too young to leave the year following, so they decided to wait until 2010. Before they could even plan anything, Patty announced around New Year's that they were soon having a baby girl. On April 12th 2010, they closed on a bigger home. On June 1st, Esther Miriam Uris was born, her middle name given after Patty's oldest high school friend. On June 20th, Stanley had a vasectomy.

“I love you, but I can't be outnumbered,” he was saying to his infant daughter, staring up at him blankly with no possible way to understand what he was saying. He was now a 33-year-old happily married father of two; the perfect nuclear family. There was no white picket fence and golden retriever, but they did live in a gated community with a tuxedo cat named Felix.

“I'm sick of looking at price comparisons,” Patty said now, her husband cradling their sleeping daughter and toddler watching Despicable Me nearby. “How are you doing over there?”

“Uh, I don't think you're going to like it.”

Patty frowned. “Why? Tell me they won't give you time off?”

Stanley shook his head, a small smile on his face. “No, that's not it.

They passed same-sex marriage in New York.”

Patty shot up straight. Stanley looked at her, smiling apologetically. But, she smiled back.

“A promise is a promise,” she said, sighing, redirecting her webpage to JetBlue. “Bora Bora after?.”

Stanley grinned, picking up his cell phone. “Bora Bora after. Check out JFK.”

Richie was in his most recent, so he dialed that first. He briefly looked at his shoulder to see that his daughter was still fast asleep. The phone clicked.

“Sup, man?” came Richie’s voice.

Stan grinned wider. “Guess who’s getting married motherfucker?!”